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To Have
and To
Hold



adapted
by Beth
Cruise

Zack and
Kelly are
tying the
knot!

To Have and To Hold

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Aladdin Paperbacks

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**To all the
fans out there
who have rooted for
Zack and Kelly**

□ □ □

To Have and To Hold

chapter

1

This is really cool, Zack Morris thought as he moved through the thick forest on his elbows and knees.

One of his best friends, A. C. Slater, was moving along the ground just behind him. "How are you doing, preppie?" he whispered to Zack.

Zack didn't feel like a preppie as he crawled through the forest dressed in battle fatigues and a helmet with a gun slung over his shoulder. He felt like a soldier on a dangerous mission. But Slater always called him preppie, referring to Zack's usual clean-cut style.

"I'm doing okay," Zack replied, brushing his blond bangs out of his hazel eyes. "But I'm getting kind of worried. We haven't sighted the enemy in a while. What do you think they're up to?"

Slater crawled forward until he was even with Zack and reached for the binoculars attached to his supply belt. "Let's take a look," he said, pushing back his helmet to reveal a mass of thick, brown curls.

Staying low, Slater hurried to a nearby clearing in the trees, then put his binoculars to his brown eyes and gazed through them, moving in a slow circle so he wouldn't miss anything.

Suddenly, he froze and his shoulders tightened.

"What do you see?" Zack asked, hurrying up behind Slater.

"I've spotted two of them about a hundred meters away," Slater reported. "They're both armed."

"Uh-oh," Zack muttered as he followed Slater's gaze to a small clearing to the right. Even without binoculars, he could see two figures crouched on a log, eating rations from cans.

Zack looked back over his shoulder. "Where the heck did Screech disappear to?" he wondered aloud. "We might need him."

Slater cast Zack a doubtful glance. "Need Screech?"

"You never know," said Zack. He had faith in his friend in an odd kind of way. Screech was definitely wacky and sometimes more than a little confused. But he had an uncanny ability to come through in a crisis. "Besides," Zack added, "we need Screech for our plan. It might come in handy."

"Right," Slater agreed. "And we might need the plan soon, with the enemy so close and all."

Just then, there was a rustling in the bushes a

few feet away. Samuel Powers, otherwise known as Screech, came staggering through the foliage, leaves and twigs sticking out of the neck and sleeves of his fatigues. His helmet was knocked to one side of his thin face, and his frizzy curls tumbled out the other side. "Help!" he whined pitifully, his elastic face contorted into a look of pure agony.

Zack had to smile. If anyone was *not* cut out for life as a soldier, it was Screech.

"Shh," Slater hissed. "And get down! We've spotted the enemy."

"The enemy?" Screech gulped as he staggered free of the bushes. "I don't like the sound of that." Swinging his gangly arms in a circle, he turned and headed back into the bushes from which he'd just emerged.

Zack stepped back and caught Screech by his scrawny shoulders. "Hey, you signed up for this just like we did," Zack reminded Screech. "Now act like a soldier."

With a resigned sigh, Screech let Zack lead him to a tree next to Slater, who was still peering through his binoculars. "What do you think?" Zack asked Slater.

"Well, they say the best defense is a good offense," Slater said thoughtfully.

Zack frowned. Back at Bayside High, Slater was the captain of both the football and the wrestling

teams. He was always saying sports strategy stuff—stuff that Zack didn't always follow. "What exactly does that mean?"

Slater grinned and shook his head. "You're supposed to be the brains of the group, preppie. It just means we'd better get them before they get us."

"Oh, why didn't you say so?" Zack said, shaking his head. "Let's make our move."

Slater nodded and stepped stealthily out from behind the tree. If they were going to attack the enemy, they'd have to get quite a bit closer while staying out of sight. It would mean keeping low and close to the trees, bushes, and boulders on the sides of the clearing.

"I'm scared," Screech whimpered.

Zack shook his head good-naturedly and grabbed hold of Screech's arm. "Come on."

Moving as a group, Zack, Slater, and Screech made their way toward the enemy. Crouching down, they moved carefully through the underbrush.

Without warning, Zack threw himself through the air as if he were about to tackle an opponent on the football field. He landed on the grass with a thud.

A second later, Screech tumbled down beside him. "Ow! I think I fell on my gun!" he moaned.

"Be quiet, Screech!" Slater whispered sharply as he threw himself on the ground next to Zack. "You're going to blow the whole operation!"

"He's right," Zack agreed. "And do you remember the plan?"

"Oh yeah, the plan," Screech said, his eyes widening as he nodded vigorously. "I remember."

"Are you sure?" Zack pressed. "We might need it. I don't want anyone getting shot."

"You can count on me," Screech said as he worked his gun out from beneath his stomach.

"Good," said Zack. "Stay alert."

"Let's go!" Slater exclaimed. He and Screech jumped to their feet and moved away from Zack, getting into the attack position.

From his place on the ground, Zack watched the enemy carefully. They had the element of surprise on their side now, but a million things could still go wrong.

A few minutes later, Screech and Slater were in position.

Slater glanced at Zack, a question in his dark eyes.

Feeling for his gun, Zack got to his feet. Then he gave the signal.

With wild whoops and howls, the three boys charged at the two soldiers.

Completely surprised, the young soldiers leaped to their feet, dropping their food. They fumbled for their weapons, but it was too late.

"Fire!" Zack roared out the command.

Zack, Screech, and Slater aimed their guns at the enemy—and let out streams of blue paint! It splattered all over the soldiers, covering their helmets and uniforms.

"Got you!" Zack cried with a triumphant laugh.

One of the enemy soldiers angrily shook paint from his sleeves. "I don't believe this!" he grumbled.

"Believe it, pal," Slater gloated. "You're our ninth kill."

Screech puffed out his narrow chest proudly. "Hand over your weapons," he commanded, an overblown, official tone in his nasal voice. "The Red Team's the Dead Team."

Glumly, the two enemy soldiers handed over their paint guns and the ammo tanks filled with red paint.

"Thank you very much," Screech said politely as he collected their things.

Zack smiled as he watched the two soldiers, still grumbling and shaking paint from their uniforms, walk off into the woods.

"According to my calculations, gentlemen," Slater reported happily, "we have wiped out the entire Red Team."

"All right, Blue Team!" Zack whooped, waving his hand in the air. Immediately, Slater and Screech slapped high fives onto Zack's open palm.

"I like this army stuff," Screech announced. "I could be all that I could be."

Slater grinned and nodded in agreement. "This is the best weekend I've ever had. Well, you know," he added with a grin, "without a girl."

Zack smiled knowingly at his friend. The only person who was possibly more crazy about girls than Zack was Slater. In fact, they'd often competed for the same girl in the past. But things were about to change. Soon Zack and Slater would never compete for a girl again. Slater could date all the girls he wanted without worrying about Zack, because Zack was about to take himself out of the dating scene—for good.

"This is great," Zack said, feeling thrilled by their victory. "I'm really glad you guys came here with me."

Slater slapped him on the back. "Hey, buddy, we wouldn't have it any other way. I'm just glad you wanted to spend your final days as a free man with us."

Screech put the back of his hand to his forehead and staggered past them tragically. "The Three Musketeers together for the last time," he said dolefully. "Next week you're going to be an old married man."

Slater grew serious and looked hard at Zack. "I still don't believe you're going through with it, Zack. You're nineteen. Think of all the fun you're missing. Think of all the *women* you're missing."

Zack shook his head. He knew what he was doing, and he was sure it was the right thing. "Ah, come on, Slater. I've dated practically every girl on this planet. There's only one I've really loved—Kelly. And I'm not going to let her get away."

"If you say so," Slater said as he settled down on the ground, leaning his broad back against a boulder.

Zack and Screech got comfortable against boulders, too. Zack leaned his head back, resting it on the cool stone. This paint-war weekend was a blast. It was fun to be out with the guys, spending time in the great outdoors. He enjoyed pitting his wits against the other teams. After all, scheming and outmaneuvering people—especially his teachers back at Bayside High—was something he'd always excelled at. And with his brains and Slater's athletic ability, it wasn't surprising that they were doing so well out here in the forest.

Zack wondered if Kelly would mind if he did this kind of thing after they were married. Why should she? Kelly was reasonable. Marriage didn't have to change things for him. Or did it?

Everyone seemed to think it did.

But Zack couldn't give up this chance to marry Kelly. He'd loved her for years, and she was the only woman for him.

As Zack gazed up through the overhanging branches into the spot of blue sky above, he thought

about his bride-to-be. Kelly was a knockout, with her shining, dark hair, deep, sparkling blue eyes, and shapely legs. But what Zack loved most about her was her heart of gold. She had a positive outlook and always gave people the benefit of the doubt.

As a couple, Zack and Kelly had had their share of ups and downs. They'd gone steady and broken up a number of times. But no matter how far Zack's attention wandered or who he ended up dating, he always found himself wanting to be with Kelly. She was his one true love.

So why not get married? They were out of high school now. They were adults. And although their futures were uncharted and uncertain, Zack knew that whatever the future held, he wanted to go through it with Kelly.

The sound of shouting coming from a nearby tree jolted Zack out of his reverie. A second later, three Red Team soldiers dropped from the tree's branches and surrounded them. One soldier was tall and thin, another short and round, and the third had crew-cut blond hair.

Zack leaped to his feet along with Screech and Slater and saw that the enemy soldiers held their paint guns at the ready.

Zack looked around frantically for his paint gun. But when he saw Slater's hands go up into the air, he knew it was all over. They'd been ambushed. The

Red Team soldiers pointed their guns right at them, and if Zack made a single move, he'd instantly be covered with red paint.

"Party's over, fellas," said the tall, thin enemy soldier. The blond soldier took their paint guns and ammo cases from their belts as the guys continued to hold their hands in the air.

"You caught us," Slater admitted, shaking his head forlornly. "You guys are good."

"They're not good," Zack snapped at Slater. "You're just stupid. You and your calculations. You said we'd paint-bomb all of them."

Slater's eyes darted back and forth, and Zack bit down a smile. *Good*, Zack thought. He'd given the signal, and Slater was with him. He understood that it was time to put the plan in action.

Zack sneaked a peek at Screech. Screech nodded so slightly that no one but Zack could have noticed.

"Oh, I'm stupid," Slater came back at Zack ferociously. "You're the genius who led us into this ambush."

"Guys, let's not quibble," said Screech diplomatically, stepping directly between them. "Zack, Slater's not stupid, and Slater, Zack's no genius."

Both Slater and Zack spoke at once. "Shut up, Screech!"

Screech pretended to be confused. "What did I do?"

"You did what you always do," cried Zack, pushing Screech toward Slater.

The Red Team soldiers watched the scene with amused smirks on their faces.

Slater pushed Screech back toward Zack. "You always ruin everything!" he shouted at Screech.

"All right," the tall Red Team soldier interrupted impatiently. "We're playing a war game here, do you mind?"

Zack and Slater ignored him as they continued pushing Screech back and forth between them. Screech's head bobbed and his legs wobbled as he let himself be shoved. "Hey!" Screech cried. "Stop it! That hurts."

But no matter how much Screech complained, Zack and Slater kept pushing him back and forth.

"Would you guys cut it out?" The short Red Team soldier was really getting annoyed now. "He's our prisoner."

Slater looked at the enemy soldier defiantly and pushed Screech so hard that he collapsed on the ground. Screech clutched his knees and began writhing in pain. "My knee!" he cried. "My knee!"

"Way to go," the blond Red Team soldier said sarcastically. "You've hurt your own man." He tossed down his paint gun and stepped toward Screech.

At that moment, Zack and Slater threw cross-

body blocks at the two remaining soldiers. In a flash, Screech rolled over to the Red Team paint gun on the ground and snapped it up. Quickly getting to one knee and reaching for his gun, Screech sprayed the blond soldier with blue paint. Zack and Slater jumped out of the way as Screech painted the tall soldier, then the short one, with a spray of blue color.

The Red Team soldiers stared at their painted arms and legs in horror.

"Yes!" Zack, Slater, and Screech all cheered together.

"Are we *bad* or what?" Zack sang out. The three guys embraced as the Red Team grumbled and walked away.

"Too much fun! I'm having too much fun!" Slater chortled gleefully.

"Come on, you guys," Screech said happily. "Let's go back to camp and celebrate."

"Okay," Zack agreed. "But not for long. I told Kelly I'd meet her at my house first thing in the morning."

Slater and Screech exchanged glances. "He's whipped," they said together in teasing voices.

Zack shot them a reproachful look, but he felt too good to be annoyed. "Come on, you guys," he said. "Let's go."

■ ■ ■

By late afternoon that day, Zack was looking out at the Pacific Palisades from the passenger seat of Slater's Ford Bronco. The threesome was headed back home to Palisades still feeling good about their paint-war victory.

As they neared Zack's neighborhood, they passed Bayside High, their old high school. Slater slowed the Bronco to a stop in front of the school.

"There it is, Bayside High," Zack said wistfully as they climbed out of the car. He would never have believed he'd be missing the place. But he did.

Slater sighed. "Too bad you can't stay in high school forever."

"My cousin can," Screech put in, following his friends up the school's main walk. "He's flunked algebra three times."

"We definitely made some history there, didn't we, guys?" Slater said.

Zack nodded fondly. "One hundred and twelve. That's how many times I was sent to the principal's office."

"Eighteen. That's how many dates I had for one prom," said Slater.

"As impressive as those numbers are, gentlemen," Screech said seriously, "I've got the record that will never be broken. Eighty-two. That's how many lockers I was stuffed into."

Slater put his large hand on Screech's skinny

shoulder. "You're right, Screech," he agreed. "That record will never be touched."

With long, loving looks at their old school, the boys climbed back into the Bronco and pulled away, heading for Zack's neighborhood.

"Well, here you are, Zack. Good luck," Slater said as he turned into Zack's driveway.

Zack grabbed his bag from the backseat and climbed out of the Bronco. "See you guys tomorrow," he said.

Screech and Slater nodded seriously. "Tomorrow," Slater echoed as he slipped the car into reverse.

Zack turned and gazed at his front door. He took a deep breath. Compared to what he was about to face, those Red Team soldiers had been a piece of cake.

chapter 2

Zack pretended to be engrossed in his food. He stared at his plate as if the pasta, French bread, and salad on it fascinated him.

Of course, he wasn't all that interested in his dinner. In fact, he was having trouble eating it. He could barely taste the tomato sauce. The bread seemed to stick in his throat. And it was difficult to chew the salad. The tension at the table was making it impossible to eat, and it was easier to stare at his food than to face his sullen, silent parents who sat on either side of him.

"So," his mother said with forced, false-sounding brightness. "You're getting married in Las Vegas. That sounds exciting." She smiled at Zack, but her smile was pinched and tight. Still, Zack was grateful that she broke the deadly silence and tried to take a positive attitude about his upcoming wedding.

"Exciting?" Mr. Morris scoffed. "It's ridiculous, a wedding in Las Vegas!" His mouth twisted into a

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mocking grin. "Who's going to marry you? Some Elvis impersonator?"

Zack slammed his fork down on the table. His father didn't have to approve, but Zack wasn't going to put up with being ridiculed.

"What do you care, Dad?" he said angrily. "You've been against this from the start!"

"Of course I'm against it," his father came back at him fiercely. Then, unexpectedly, Mr. Morris's face softened as he looked at his son. "Zack, I don't want you to throw your life away."

They'd been over and over this, but Zack decided to try one last time to make his father understand. "I'm not throwing my life away, okay? Kelly and I have been in love since grammar school. This is the real thing, Dad."

"Kelly is a terrific girl," his dad replied. "And I don't doubt your feelings for each other. But can't it wait until you at least graduate from college?"

"No, it can't," Zack insisted firmly. He felt himself losing patience. They'd discussed this a hundred times. "Look, we've planned this out. We got a place off campus. We're both going to work . . ."

Zack let his voice trail off when he saw that his father wasn't listening. Mr. Morris was sitting with his arms folded across his chest, shaking his head. "You're making a big mistake," he said.

Zack had had it. His father was impossible to

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talk to! "Hey, if I'm making a mistake, at least it's *my* mistake," he said angrily. "It *is* my life! Isn't it?"

"Fine," Mr. Morris replied obstinately. "Do what you have to do. But leave me out of it."

Zack was stunned. His father couldn't be serious! "Are you telling me you're not coming to my wedding?" he asked, wanting to be sure he understood his father correctly.

Mr. Morris's face remained set. Zack shot a darting glance at his mother, who had tears in her eyes. For several long moments, Zack waited for his father's reply.

But Mr. Morris said nothing, and Zack finally took his silence to mean that he wouldn't be there.

Feeling as if he would burst with anger and hurt, Zack sprang to his feet and stormed out of the dining room and up the stairs to his bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

How could his father be such a creep? Zack thought as he paced across the room. He was treating Zack as if he were a child—as if he didn't know how to run his own life! Who was he to say when Zack was ready to get married?

After a while, Zack felt a bit calmer. He sat on the edge of the bed and gazed around his room, his eyes wandering past the model battleship his father had helped him build and past the BMX bike he and his father had assembled on his eleventh birthday.

He glanced at a Little League trophy and remembered how his father had coached him when he was having trouble with his batting. He smiled fondly at the first-grade spelling award that hung on his wall. His father had spent weeks helping him prepare for that.

Zack got up and walked to his dresser. On it was a photo of Mr. Morris with five-year-old Zack on his lap. He was reading Zack a book titled *Good Night, Moon*.

Sighing, Zack picked up the photo. His father wasn't really a bad guy. In fact, he was a great dad. So why couldn't he understand how Zack felt? Kelly meant everything to him, and he couldn't risk losing her. If he waited until he graduated from college, it might be too late.

There was a knock on his door, and Mrs. Morris stuck her head into the room. "You okay?" she asked gently.

"Yeah, I'll be all right," Zack replied, setting the photo back down on his dresser. "But why does he have to act like that?"

Stepping into Zack's room, Mrs. Morris put her hand on Zack's shoulder. "Your father always had great plans for you, and getting married at nineteen isn't on his list," she explained.

"What about *my* list?" Zack asked.

Mrs. Morris sat down on Zack's bed. "Zack, I

think you're too young to get married, too. But if you're truly happy about this, that's all that really matters to me."

Zack sat down and gave his mother a hug. She was a wonderful mom, and Zack appreciated how hard she was trying to understand his feelings. Besides, being caught between Zack and his father couldn't be easy—even if she was used to it.

They sat quietly for a moment. Then a painful question rang through Zack's mind. Would his mother come to the wedding without his father? He had to know the answer. "So, are you going to be there?" he asked.

A look of sadness crossed his mother's face. "You have my blessing, but I can't be at the wedding," she said. "I can't go against your father."

Zack nodded. He was completely disheartened, but he understood.

"Do you need money?" his mother asked.

"I'm fine, Mom," Zack replied, getting up from the bed. "I've got about twelve hundred. We can have a nice little wedding for that."

Mrs. Morris reached into her pants pocket and pulled out a white envelope folded in half. She handed the envelope to Zack. "Well, here are vouchers for free rooms at the Stardust Hotel."

Zack looked at his mother quizzically. Where had she gotten these?

Mrs. Morris understood his unspoken question. "I won them during poker night at church," she explained.

Zack smiled. "What can I say?" he told her warmly. "You've always been there for me."

"You'll always be my little boy," she replied with a smile, "even though you're all grown up."

Zack hugged his mother again. Somehow he had the strange feeling that he was saying good-bye to her. In a way, when he left for Las Vegas tomorrow, he'd be leaving her forever.

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The next morning, Zack's eyes snapped open earlier than usual. His alarm hadn't even rung yet, but he couldn't stay in bed. He was too excited.

Tossing the covers aside, he jumped out of bed and pulled on a neat pair of jeans and a maroon T-shirt, then threw a short-sleeved plaid shirt over the T-shirt. After lacing up his white high-tops, brushing his teeth, and running a comb through his hair, he was set. "Ready," he told his image in the mirror. Zack was surprised to hear his voice shake a bit.

All right. So maybe he was a little nervous. That didn't mean he was doing the wrong thing. After all, he was going to get married. Everyone felt nervous just before they did that. That's what he'd always heard, anyway.

Zack lifted his duffel bag and stepped into the hall. Walking past his parents' bedroom, he saw that they were still sleeping. There was no point in waking them, he decided. They knew where he was going. Besides, his mother might cry, and his father was probably still angry.

Zack made his way down the stairs, through the living room, and out the front door. The morning was misty and cool. *A great day to begin the rest of my life*, Zack thought excitedly.

Through the mist, he spotted Slater's Bronco rounding the corner. He was glad Slater was on time. Zack didn't want anything—*anything!*—to go wrong today.

The Bronco pulled into the driveway, and Slater and Screech got out. "Hey, guys!" Zack said, walking toward them.

"You ready, buddy?" Slater asked enthusiastically. Zack nodded.

"Vegas, here we come!" cheered Screech, punching the air with his fist.

Just then a red BMW 325 pulled into the driveway behind Slater's Bronco. The doors opened, and Kelly and Lisa Turtle—Kelly's best friend—jumped out.

Zack's heart leaped at the sight of Kelly. Dressed in a baby blue shirt with khaki-colored shorts and sandals, she looked terrific. Zack could hardly believe that she'd soon be his wife.

"Hey, guys," Kelly greeted them as Zack hurried over to her. "Hey, handsome," she said as she wound her arms around his neck and leaned in for a kiss.

Zack sighed as his lips brushed against Kelly's. Now that she was here, their plan seemed absolutely perfect. She was all that mattered, and he never wanted to let her out of his arms.

"I can't watch this," Slater joked, pretending to be sickened by Kelly and Zack's embrace. "It's a good thing we're going in separate cars."

That caught Zack's attention. Still holding Kelly close, he looked sharply at Slater. "Whoa," he said. "Why are we going in separate cars?"

"Because Kelly and I have a lot of *things* to talk about," Lisa said meaningfully. "I still don't believe you're going through with this wedding, Zack." She smiled as she spoke, but Zack knew she wasn't totally kidding.

Zack sighed. Not Lisa, too. It was bad enough having his own father opposed to the wedding. He didn't need Lisa to be giving him a hard time also. "For your information, it's a done deal, Lisa," he told her firmly.

Kelly ran her slender hand along Zack's brow as if to smooth away the frown lines there. "I told my parents and they're all excited," she said to Zack. "Unfortunately, they can't help us out financially."

This didn't surprise Zack. He'd known Kelly long enough to realize that her parents didn't have much money—the Kapowskis were a big family with a lot of love and not a lot of cash. But Zack was glad they were happy about the wedding.

"Well, at least they're behind us," Zack said. "My dad thinks I'm crazy. And my parents aren't coming."

Kelly's blue eyes widened in concern. "I'm sorry," she said softly.

"Me, too," Zack admitted. "But I'm an adult and I can make my own decisions." He looked down at Kelly's blue eyes and gave her hand a squeeze. "Let's get going," he said.

Screech stepped into the middle of the group, his portable personal computer in his hand. He punched a few buttons, then looked up at them, his expression serious.

"Okay, people," he announced importantly, "with my computerized trip plan, our two vehicles should never be more than fifty yards apart. I've planned our exact route, including food breaks and fuel stops. I've also done some research. Do you know that the cleanest rest room in California is at the Mobil station in Barstow?"

"Doesn't everybody know that?" Zack cracked, making everyone smile.

"All right," said Slater, clapping his hands together. "Let's do it!"

Slater and Screech got into the Bronco, and Lisa headed for her BMW. But when Zack started to follow the guys into the Bronco, Kelly kept hold of his hand. "I'll miss you," she said with a pout.

"I'll miss you more," Zack replied. Gently, he pulled Kelly to him and kissed her again. Being apart for even a few hours was going to be difficult. But after they were married, they'd have the rest of their lives to spend together.

"Come on!" Slater, Screech, and Lisa cried impatiently.

Zack planted one last smooch on Kelly's lips before they broke apart and headed toward their respective cars.

As the car turned into the street, Zack glanced back at his house. The front door was open, and his mother stood on the porch.

Zack watched her until the Bronco turned a corner. "Bye, Mom," he whispered softly.

chapter 3

Kelly gazed wistfully out the window as Lisa steered the BMW onto the highway. She missed Zack already. She couldn't see the Bronco ahead of them, and it made Zack seem very far away.

When Zack was close by, when Kelly could see and touch him, she was sure that marrying him was the right thing to do. But when they were apart, she started having doubts.

That was when the practical reasons *not* to get married overwhelmed her. After all, nineteen *was* young. They were still in school, and they wouldn't have much money to start out with. Would they have enough to get by?

Kelly worried about what marriage would do to their careers, too. What if they got job offers after college that sent them to opposite ends of the country? One of them would have to turn down their offer. Who would it be?

As the BMW glided down the highway, Kelly tried to concentrate on Zack's handsome face and

the warm, loving way he looked at her. Marrying him *bad* to be the right thing. She loved him and would never find another Zack as long as she lived.

"You don't really think I'm making a mistake, do you?" The question was out of Kelly's mouth before she knew it.

Lisa bit her lower lip, searching for a diplomatic reply. "You already know how I feel," she said after a moment. "I think you and Zack are too young to get married. I mean, what's the rush?" Then Lisa's face broke out into a smile. "But I love weddings—they're so romantic. Remember when we all dressed as brides in the seventh grade?"

"Yeah," Kelly replied with a smile. "And now I get to do it for real."

"Have you thought about your dress?" Lisa was clothes-crazy and wanted to be a designer. Some of her outfits had even won design contests.

"Are you kidding?" Kelly giggled. "I've got sixty back issues of *Bride* magazine."

"It sounds as if *you're* pretty sure *you're* doing the right thing," Lisa said seriously. "And so does Zack."

"Zack's even more excited than I am," Kelly said. "He can't talk about anything else." She was glad Zack was so confident. He had enough confidence for the two of them, and his confidence was contagious.

The girls drifted into silence again as they cruised along the highway. Kelly caught sight of the Bronco in front of them and smiled to herself.

After a while, the girls started talking about what Kelly and Zack's new off-campus apartment would be like. "I'd like curtains in the kitchen and little pots filled with flowers on the windowsill," Kelly admitted with a giggle.

"That's so Brady Bunch," Lisa objected with a grin.

"I know," Kelly agreed. "I love that house." She could just picture the two of them in an adorable little house. Maybe they'd have two kittens. And it would be wonderful if they could find an apartment with a fireplace. Kelly sighed dreamily as she imagined her and Zack curled up in front of the fire. She instinctively looked for the Bronco, but it was out of sight once again. "Where could they be?" she wondered aloud.

□ □ □

As the Bronco moved along the highway, Zack, Slater, and Screech were embroiled in a boisterous argument about action-adventure movie heroes. "Are you trying to tell me Jean-Claude Van Damme is tougher than Steven Segal?" Zack cried. "No way!"

Slater scoffed loudly. "Van Damme can take out a whole army!"

"And Steven Segal can't?" Zack challenged.

"You know who's a lot tougher than he looks?" Screech put in. "Martin Short."

Zack and Slater shot Screech looks of disbelief.

"He is!" Screech insisted.

"All right, forget tough guys," said Zack. "Best baseball player."

"Barry Bonds," Slater suggested without hesitation.

"Right," Zack agreed.

"Best American chess player," Screech said.

Zack and Slater gave Screech another I-can't-believe-you-just-said-that look.

"Most beautiful model?" Slater asked.

"Elle MacPherson!" Zack, Slater, and Screech shouted together. Then they all broke into laughter.

"This is fun," Slater said. "And I can't believe you're going to ruin it all by getting married, Zack."

Zack rolled his eyes. He knew Slater was just giving him a hard time, but he was still bummed about the fact that his parents weren't coming to the wedding. "Just drive, will you?" he grumbled.

"Hey, what do you say we three bachelors drive down to Mexico and all go fishing for the week?" Slater suggested as they passed an exit sign that would have taken them to the border.

Glancing in the side rearview mirror, Zack noticed that the BMW was no longer in sight. "Hey," he cried. "Where are the girls? Do you guys see them?"

Screech stretched his skinny neck out the back window. "They're not anywhere in sight," he declared.

"Slater, pull over," Zack said anxiously.

Slater pulled the Bronco onto the shoulder.

"Great!" Zack exploded. "We're two miles out of Los Angeles and we've already lost the girls!"

□ □ □

Lisa's car phone jingled, and Lisa hit the no-hands button. "Hello?"

Zack's voice filled the car. "Where are you?" he asked, sounding annoyed.

"We're on the Santa Monica Freeway going east," Lisa reported. "Where are you?"

"We're on the side of the road waiting for you. If you girls can't keep up with us..."

Lisa didn't wait for him to say any more. She pressed her foot to the accelerator and picked up speed. "Hey, we *girls* are perfectly capable of driving to Las Vegas without you leading us there by the nose," she told Zack. "In fact, I'll bet you a dinner we'll beat you there."

"You're on," Zack accepted the challenge.

"Fine," said Lisa, turning off the phone. "I'll show them!"

"Careful, Lisa," Kelly warned. "You don't want to get a speeding ticket."

"I won't go crazy," Lisa assured her.

After a few minutes, Kelly and Lisa sped past the Bronco. Lisa honked and waved. "I think I'll let them eat my dust all the way to Las Vegas," she said.

For the next few hours, Lisa was too intent on driving to make much conversation. So Kelly pulled out one of her *Bride* magazines and began thumbing through it. She knew she'd never be able to afford a really ornate bridal gown, but there was one with long, graceful lines that looked like it might be reasonably priced.

All of a sudden, a wave of sadness passed over Kelly. She wished her mother could be there to help her make these decisions. If she were getting married closer to home, her mother would probably even offer to make her a dress. She was a real whiz on the sewing machine.

Kelly had always dreamed that when she got married, her whole family would be there with her. But they didn't have the money to make this trip to Las Vegas. Besides, her parents couldn't get the time off from work on such short notice. Luckily, they understood, and they wished Zack and Kelly well. But getting married without them just didn't seem right.

Suddenly a strange sound made Kelly look up sharply from her magazine. "What was that?" she asked Lisa.

"I don't know," Lisa admitted, her dark eyes filled with alarm. "But the thermostat is rising fast."

"What does that mean?" asked Kelly.

"It means that the engine is overheating," Lisa hit her lower lip anxiously. "But I don't know why."

Kelly noticed for the first time that they'd turned off the Santa Monica Freeway. They were somewhere in the California desert. "Where are we?" she asked.

"Interstate Fifteen," Lisa replied as the engine made an awful banging sound. "I have to get off the road," she said, steering onto the shoulder.

The car sputtered, coughed, and then wheezed to a stop. "I don't believe this!" Lisa shouted, slapping the steering wheel angrily.

Kelly got out of the car. She wasn't a mechanic, but she knew a few things about engines. "Release the hood," she called to Lisa. "Maybe it's something simple."

When she heard the latch release, Kelly lifted the hood, praying she'd instantly spot a loose hose or cable. Then she could simply reattach it and they'd be on their way. But when she propped the hood open and peered into the engine, nothing jumped out at her. On a hunch, she turned the radiator cap. A torrent of steam shot into the air, and she quickly jumped out of the way.

"Be careful, Kelly!" Lisa exclaimed. "That's got to be dangerous!"

"It's overheated all right, but I'm not sure what

to do about it," Kelly called back to Lisa. "Do you have any water or antifreeze in the trunk?"

Lisa shook her head dismally, then a smile crossed her face. "I'll just have some delivered, though," she said as she reached for the car phone. "In fact, I'll have it delivered by a mechanic with a tow truck."

Her smile quickly turned back to a frown. "I can't get anything on the phone," she moaned. "We must be too far out."

Kelly climbed back into the passenger seat. "Let me try," she offered, punching numbers into the keypad on the phone. But all she heard was annoying high-pitched static.

Lisa climbed out of the car. "Great, the car's broken down in the middle of nowhere, the heat is stifling, and I'm low on lip gloss."

"Take it easy, Lisa," Kelly said reassuringly. "I'm sure Zack will be by to save us."

Lisa rolled her eyes. "Boy, you really are in love," she said.

Kelly ignored Lisa's skepticism. She gazed down the seemingly endless highway. There wasn't a car in sight, but Zack and the guys were behind them. They had to come along sometime.

She rested her hands on the top of the car and leaned her cheek against them. "Come on, Zack," she whispered. "Hurry up. We need you."

□ □ □

Zack had taken the wheel of the Bronco so the guys could be sure to beat Lisa to Las Vegas. Beside him, Slater sat with a map spread out against the dashboard. "Zack, your stupid shortcut isn't anywhere near the main highway," he said in an exasperated tone.

"That's why they call it a shortcut, Slater," Zack insisted confidently. "No girl is going to beat me to Las Vegas."

"That's the spirit!" Screech cheered from the backseat. "Step on it, Zack."

Zack pressed heavily on the gas. They were the only vehicle on the long, straight road. Who would care if he went over the speed limit? Who would even know?

A few minutes later, Zack became aware of a long, low whine coming from somewhere. He swatted near his ear, thinking it was a mosquito. But the whining just kept getting louder.

Screech tapped his shoulder urgently. "Uh, Zack, I think you'd better slow down."

"Not now, Screech. I'm—" Just then, Zack looked in the rearview mirror and gasped. A police car was closing in fast, its red light flashing. That hadn't been a mosquito he'd heard.

It was the sound of a police siren.

chapter

4

Zack rolled down his window and plastered his most charming smile on his face as the officer approached the car. The man appeared to be in his fifties and was wearing dark, mirrored glasses. His belly preceded him by several inches.

"Hi there," Zack greeted cheerfully.

"Hi there?" the officer scowled. Zack could read his nameplate. His name was Myron Thorpe. And Zack had the sinking feeling Officer Thorpe wasn't the kind of person he could easily charm out of writing up a speeding ticket.

But Zack was always game for a new challenge, and Officer Thorpe looked like the challenge of a lifetime!

"What's the problem, officer?" Zack asked innocently.

"You were speeding through my county, hot-shot," Thorpe growled. "I hate that. I'm the sheriff around here, and no one speeds through my county and gets away with it."

To Have and To Hold

"Now that you mention it, sir, I guess I was going a tad fast," said Zack, nodding.

"A tad?" the officer barked. "I had you clocked at eighty-five. That's twenty miles an hour over the speed limit, son. You know how much room you need to stop a car that fast?"

Screech leaned forward from the backseat, punching numbers into his handheld computer. "Seven hundred and thirty-two feet, sir," he volunteered.

Officer Thorpe stared at Screech with a withering glare. "You trying to be funny, boy?"

"No, sir. I was using the standard formula of eight feet a second—"

"Drop it, Screech," Slater advised.

"License and registration," Officer Thorpe growled.

As Zack pulled his wallet from his back pocket, he silently cursed his bad luck. Auto insurance was high enough for guys his age. With a speeding ticket on his record, it would go through the roof. Not to mention that he'd have to use some of his wedding savings to pay for this ticket. And all because he wanted to win a stupid bet.

"Where you fellas from?" Thorpe asked.

"Los Angeles," Zack said as he handed the man his license. "You see, sir, I'm on my way to Las Vegas to get married. My fiancée is waiting for me,

so if you could just give me the ticket, we'll be on our way."

"Los Angeles, huh?" said Thorpe, peering down at Zack's license. "Ever meet that girl who plays Blossom?"

"No," Slater said.

"Good actress, but she's no dancer," said Thorpe. "Why they have her dancing at the beginning of every show is beyond me."

"We'll talk to them about that when we get back to L.A.," Zack replied. What was Thorpe talking about? Well, maybe he wasn't as tough as he appeared. He watched *Blossom*, after all. He might still let him go without a ticket.

"Where's your registration?" the policeman asked.

Zack turned sharply to Slater. "Where's your registration?" he echoed.

Slater had already emptied his wallet, frantically tossing its contents all around the front seat. Now he pawed through the glove compartment. He looked at Zack, panic in his eyes. "I must've lost it," he mumbled.

"You lost your registration!" cried Officer Thorpe. "That's a no-no. A big nooo!"

"That's bad?" Slater asked.

"Very bad," Officer Thorpe confirmed. "Wait here. I gotta run your plates."

Zack thought he saw Officer Thorpe grin to himself as he headed back to his patrol car to check on the Bronco's license plate number. This didn't look good at all. "How could you lose your registration?" he asked Slater harshly.

"I don't know," Slater replied, slumping back into his seat. "I cleaned out the glove compartment last week. I must've thrown it out by mistake."

"I keep the registration for my bike pinned to my underwear," said Screech, leaning over the seat.

Slater rolled his eyes. "Why didn't I think of that?"

The boys went silent as Officer Thorpe returned to their car. "I've got good news and bad news," he told them.

Zack felt his heart sink. "What's the bad news?" he asked.

"This car has shown up stolen," Officer Thorpe declared.

Zack gripped the steering wheel. How could that possibly be?

"That's impossible, sir!" Slater cried. "You see, I bought this car just last—"

"You calling me a liar?" Officer Thorpe barked, pulling off his mirrored glasses and fixing Slater with a steely glare.

"No, sir," said Slater, his voice shaking. "But there has to be some mistake."

"I don't think so," the officer said evenly, shaking his head. "I gotta take you boys in. Outta the car. Now!"

Slowly Zack, Slater, and Screech got out of the Bronco. They knew from watching countless police shows that they were supposed to stand facing the Bronco, with their arms and legs spread. Immediately Officer Thorpe began frisking them.

"Is this really necessary?" Slater asked as Officer Thorpe patted him down.

"Don't tell me how to do my job!" Officer Thorpe snapped irritably.

After frisking Zack and Slater, Officer Thorpe got to Screech. As soon as he touched him, Screech began to wiggle and burst into a fit of giggles. "Stand still, will you?" Officer Thorpe ordered.

But Screech couldn't control his laughter. "Sorry, sir," he spoke through the giggles. "I'm ticklish. I get it from my father's side. He couldn't even scrub himself in the shower without laughing."

Screech's laughter was contagious, and both Zack and Slater had to bite down on their smiles. But Officer Thorpe wasn't even slightly amused. "You have the right to remain silent," he began, reciting their rights. He stopped and looked at Screech. "And I *wish* you'd remain silent, too."

A second later, Officer Thorpe sprang into action. With lightning speed, he grabbed something

out of Screech's back pocket. "What's this?" he cried accusingly.

"It's a Pez dispenser," Screech replied. "Want one? It's cherry."

"You trying to bribe me, son?" Officer Thorpe came up close to Screech's face.

With a sidelong glance, Zack saw Screech start to tremble. "You have to excuse him," Zack said in his friend's defense. "You see, as a child he was dropped on his head. Repeatedly."

"Okay, boys, I gotta cuff you. It's procedure." Officer Thorpe slapped the first pair of cuffs onto Slater, chaining his wrists behind his back. "Dang! Only got one pair left," he muttered to himself. Gruffly, he pulled Zack and Screech together, cuffing Zack's right wrist to Screech's left. "Terrific!" Zack mumbled sourly.

"Get in the car, fellas," Officer Thorpe demanded.

Zack shook his head miserably as he walked to the patrol car. This couldn't be happening! It was like a bad dream—except that it was frightfully real.

Officer Thorpe opened the patrol car doors, and Slater slipped into the front seat. Zack plopped down dismally into the backseat, forgetting Screech was handcuffed to him.

"Ow!" Screech cried as his head banged on the top of the car door.

"Watch your heads," Officer Thorpe warned.

Zack looked at the patrolman and shook his head dismally. Now he was sure of it. Officer Thorpe wore a look of glee—the man was really happy about this.

Officer Thorpe climbed into the driver's seat and flipped a switch. They pulled back out onto the highway, the siren screaming overhead.

"You see, sir," Slater began to explain. "I had the registration, but it must have fallen out of—"

"Save it, kid," Thorpe cut him short. "I hear that story all the time."

Zack gazed out the window at the flat landscape zooming by. Here they were, in the middle of nowhere, accused of stealing a car that wasn't even stolen. How would he explain this to Kelly? Things couldn't possibly get any worse.

With a sudden jerk, Screech yanked Zack's hand off his knee. "Screech!" Zack cried.

Wriggling his nose manically, Screech pulled Zack's hand around wildly as he searched for a tissue in his left pants pocket. Finally, he unearthed one and sneezed into it.

"Sorry, Zack, I had to sneeze," Screech apologized.

Zack rolled his eyes. The only thing worse than being dragged off to jail for something he didn't do was being dragged off to jail handcuffed to Screech!

"Now I have an itch," said Screech.

"Don't even think about it," Zack warned.

They drove for another ten minutes, then turned off the highway. Officer Thorpe navigated through a small, dingy town until they got to a large stucco building.

"Out ya go," Sheriff Thorpe said gruffly as they walked the few steps into the building. As Zack stepped inside, he wondered how he'd gotten into this mess. And what was Thorpe going to do with them. Throw them in jail? *No way!* Zack shook himself. That was crazy—surely Thorpe wouldn't do *that*. Zack tried to remember the courtroom dramas he'd seen. They'd probably just have to pay bail and then they could go.

Zack sighed to himself. Paying bail meant saying good-bye to more of his precious wedding money.

A square-shouldered officer with dark, slicked-back hair sat stiffly at one of the desks in the main office area. Zack glanced at his nameplate and saw only a single name printed on it. Dano.

"Suspicion of grand theft auto," Sheriff Thorpe announced. "Book 'em, Dano."

Deputy Dano leaped eagerly to his feet. "Yes, sir!"

Zack exchanged a quick, worried glance with Slater. Deputy Dano's enthusiasm wasn't a good sign. Why were Thorpe and Dano so thrilled to have them in custody? *Probably boredom*, Zack decided.

Here in Nowheresville there probably wasn't much action. He'd bet that this was the most exciting thing that had happened in years.

Deputy Dano led the guys to a room in the back of the building, where a camera stood on a tripod. "Mug shots," he announced in a stiff, official voice.

First Zack had his photo taken. He slouched in front of the camera, his expression downcast. Next, it was Slater's turn. His dark eyes blazed with defiant anger as Deputy Dano snapped the pictures.

Only Screech seemed unbothered. He tried out a different expression for every shot. In one, he practiced his debonair jewel-thief face. In another, he tried looking "bad." For his profile shot, he stuck out his tongue and crossed his eyes.

At times like these, Zack really envied Screech's wacky sense of reality. Nothing seemed to bother him. He tried to adopt some of Screech's attitude, but it was no use. He couldn't ignore the fact that they were in big trouble. And what was he going to tell Kelly?

After the mug shots were taken, Deputy Dano took the guys' fingerprints. Screech was the last to be fingerprinted, and he suddenly sprang at Deputy Dano, smearing his inky fingers on the policeman's white shirt as he grabbed the man by the collar. "You've got to let us go!" Screech wailed. "Please! Please! Please!"

Zack shook his head. He knew that Screech was

simply playing another role—that of the desperate prisoner.

Screech noticed the ink-smeared mess he'd made of Deputy Dano's shirt and froze. His elastic face stretched into an expression of horror.

"Back off!" Deputy Dano yelled at Screech. "You're assaulting an officer."

Screech jumped back immediately.

"You're also going to pay for this shirt," Deputy Dano added, looking down at the black smudges.

"Mr. Dano, sir," Zack ventured. "Can I call you Dano? This is one big mistake."

"We're not car thieves," Slater jumped in. "We've never done anything wrong in our lives. Well, we once cheated on a philosophy test, but—"

"You know you have a right to a lawyer," said Deputy Dano in a flat, humorless tone.

Zack threw his arms out in exasperation. "Where are we going to find a lawyer out here?"

"Not to worry, guys," Screech said brightly. "I took a semester of prelaw in high school." He fixed Deputy Dano in a somber gaze, one eyebrow arched suavely. "Do you know the words 'due process'?" he challenged.

"Do you know the words 'shut up'?" Deputy Dano replied.

"Yes, sir," said Screech, his self-important expression melting away. "I hear them everyday."

At that moment, Sheriff Thorpe stomped into the office. "I got some more good news and some more bad news," he announced.

"The bad news being?" Zack asked.

"The car is reported stolen and you guys match the description of the three suspects."

"And the good news?" asked Slater hopefully.

"The good news is that we just transferred some prisoners and there's room for you boys in the jail," Sheriff Thorpe told them as a wide grin spread across his face.

"You're putting us in jail?" Zack gasped.

Sheriff Thorpe nodded. "Lock 'em up, Dano," he ordered.

chapter 5

Kelly sat perched on the back bumper of the BMW, gazing glumly down the long, deserted stretch of highway. Where could Zack be? she wondered. He should have come along by now.

Someone should have come along by now. This had to be the most deserted spot on earth! It was just their luck to have broken down in the middle of nowhere. They might as well be stranded on the moon.

Lisa climbed up onto the hood of the car and sighed. "I guess this means I lose my bet with Zack," she grumbled. "The worst part of this is that I owe him a dinner."

Kelly smiled. How could Lisa worry about a silly old bet at a time like this? "I hope Zack isn't worried about us," she said.

Suddenly Kelly leaped to her feet. She'd spotted a figure in the distance, about fifty yards away. It had appeared suddenly from behind a slight rise in the mostly flat highway. Squinting into the sunlight,

Kelly noticed that the approaching person looked pretty young. "Someone's coming," she told Lisa.

Lisa slid off the hood and shielded her eyes to see.

As the young man got closer, Kelly saw that he had long, messy brown hair. He wore jeans, an Indian buckskin vest, and sandals.

"Look at him, Kelly. He's some sort of grungy hippie," Lisa said, wrinkling her nose in disgust.

"Lisa, he's the first human being we've seen in an hour," Kelly replied. Maybe he knew something about cars. Maybe he could get them moving again.

By now, the stranger was just a few yards away. "Looks like you girls can use some help," he greeted them with a smile.

"No, we'll be fine without you," Lisa said quickly. "We're just enjoying the scenery."

Kelly gave her friend a sharp glance. She loved Lisa, but sometimes she put too much emphasis on the way people looked. She'd obviously decided not to accept help from this person because of his appearance.

But Kelly didn't care what his clothes and hair looked like. It was the inside of a person that counted. Besides, they were hardly in a position to be critical about someone who was offering to help. "Don't listen to her," Kelly told the stranger apologetically. "We're stuck, and we'd really appreciate some help."

"Sure," the stranger agreed. "I'm Curt Martin."

"I'm Kelly. She's Lisa."

Kelly pressed the release button and Curt opened the hood, while Lisa peered over his shoulder.

"What are you doing out here in the middle of nowhere—if I can ask," Lisa inquired suspiciously.

"You can ask," Curt replied with an amused smile. "I teach school at an Indian reservation a couple of miles from here." He looked back at the engine and shook his head thoughtfully. "Never thought a yuppie car like this would break down," he said.

"Yuppie car!" Lisa yelled indignantly. "Excuse me! What do you drive, a VW van with flowers and peace signs painted all over it?"

"I don't own a car," Curt said in a matter-of-fact way. "I get by just fine without material things."

Lisa snorted lightly. "Including a comb," she commented.

Curt registered the insult with a droll smile that turned up the corners of his mouth. Kelly noticed that once you looked past his scruffiness, he was really very good-looking—not as handsome as Zack, of course, but handsome nonetheless.

"I know a little something about BMWs," Curt said as he leaned over the engine. "Do you have any tools?"

"How should I know?" Lisa replied snottily.

"I think I noticed a tool kit in the trunk," Kelly said, heading around to the back of the car. She unlocked the trunk and took out a black plastic tool kit. It was still wrapped in cellophane.

"Great," Curt said, taking the kit from her.

"What do you think's wrong with the car?" Kelly asked.

Curt squinted as he peered under the hood. "Looks like your fan belt broke and overheated your engine," he said.

"Can you fix it?" Lisa asked.

"Maybe," Curt replied. "I'm gonna need your belt."

Lisa's eyes widened in horror. "No way," she said. "This is an Italian import."

"Give it to him, Lisa," Kelly advised. "We want to get out of here, don't we?"

Lisa sighed and reluctantly unbuckled her leather belt. She handed it to Curt, who took out a pocket knife and cut the buckle off. With an agonized groan, Lisa turned and went to sit in the car. A few minutes later Kelly joined her.

"Do you think he really knows what he's doing?" Lisa asked as she handed Kelly a bottle of Evian spring water.

Kelly shrugged. "I hope so."

Lisa took a sip of spring water and fanned herself. It was really hot.

"Start it up," Curt suddenly called to them.

Lisa sat forward and started the engine. With a wonderful rumble, it turned over. "All right!" Lisa cheered happily.

Curt appeared at the driver's window. "I'm going to need that water for the radiator," he said, nodding toward their Evian.

"This water?" Lisa cried.

"Yeah," Curt said.

"All of it?" Lisa asked, clutching the bottle to her chest.

"Yuppie cars need yuppie water," Curt said with a twinkle in his eye.

Kelly handed him her bottle. Reluctantly, Lisa gave up hers as well. "Careful," she warned as she opened her door and climbed out of the car. "That stuff costs eight bucks a gallon."

Kelly got out of the car, too, and joined Lisa and Curt under the hood. Curt was wasting no time filling the radiator with the spring water, and Lisa looked *totally* dismayed. Kelly didn't care, though. She was just glad that the engine was running.

"I think it's going to work," said Curt as the last drop of water slid from the bottle. "It'll at least get us to Las Vegas."

"Us?" asked Lisa, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah," said Curt. "I was heading toward the highway to hitch a ride when I met you."

"We'll take you," Kelly said with a nod. "It's the least we can do."

Lisa folded her arms and looked Curt up and down. After all, it was her car. "What's in Las Vegas?" she asked.

Curt removed the support bar and closed the hood. "I work at a hotel part of the year to make ends meet."

"Well, I guess you can have a ride," Lisa said grudgingly.

"I appreciate it," Curt said with a smile. "We can get to know each other."

Lisa rolled her eyes as she turned to open the driver's-side door. "You sit in the back," she said.

While Curt climbed into the backseat, Kelly buckled her seat belt and settled in next to Lisa. A moment later they pulled back onto the highway.

Kelly was thrilled to be moving again, but a nagging thought at the back of her mind was pestering her. Why hadn't the guys come by? Had something gone wrong? *They probably took another route*, she told herself, *and are in Las Vegas already*. Zack would be worried sick about her. What if he thought she'd turned back? He might think she was standing him up. He might give up on her and leave!

Kelly clutched her hands together nervously. It would be awful if Zack thought she had gotten cold feet.

No, she assured herself. Zack would have more confidence in her than that. He knew she loved him. He'd worry, but he'd wait.

Kelly let her head fall back against the headrest. There was nothing to do now but relax and hope the BMW held out until they arrived in Las Vegas. As they drove along, Kelly watched the monotonously flat landscape slip by. Before she knew it, she'd dozed off into a dreamless sleep.

■ ■ ■

When Kelly awoke, it took her a moment to realize where she was. Bright lights blared into her drowsy eyes. Sitting forward, she looked out the window at the blaze of neon sights that lit up the night.

They'd arrived in Las Vegas at last!

"I don't believe this place!" Kelly gasped. "All the lights. All the people! It's so exciting!"

"Yeah, the town that never sleeps," Lisa said with an excited smile. She turned the BMW into the brightly lit drive of the Stardust Hotel and stopped the car. As the girls climbed out, a doorman in a crisp uniform rushed forward to take their bags.

"Thanks for the ride, girls," Curt said as he climbed out of the backseat.

"Hey, thanks for fixing our car," Kelly replied.

"Great talking to you, Lisa," Curt said. "I'm sure we'll be seeing more of each other."

"Don't count on it," Lisa sniffed.

Lisa's coldness didn't seem to bother Curt in the least. He winked at her and waved good-bye to Kelly as he headed toward the front door of the hotel.

"I think he likes you," Kelly commented, watching him disappear into the crowd of people in the hotel's bright front lobby.

"Please, spare me," Lisa said. But she smiled—just a little.

The girls headed into the lobby and up to the check-in desk. After they'd gotten their keys, Kelly asked the clerk if Zack Morris had checked in yet.

The woman keyed the name into the computer and shook her head. "There's no one here by that name."

Kelly frowned. If Zack wasn't at the hotel, where was he? There had to be some mistake. "Are you sure?" she pressed.

"Sorry," said the woman. "I'll get someone to help you to your room." She rang a bell on the desk. Instantly, a bellman in a vested uniform approached, wheeling a luggage cart.

Kelly's jaw dropped in surprise.

The bellman was Curt!

In a very short time, Curt had cleaned himself up, shaven, tied his hair into a neat ponytail, and changed into a bellman's uniform. It was a startling

transformation. Curt looked like an entirely different person!

Kelly immediately saw that she'd been right about Curt. Without all the scruffiness, he was *very* good-looking.

"Hey, long time no see," Curt joked as he began loading their bags onto his cart.

Lisa had been so busy looking around that she hadn't noticed him until that moment. She jumped back against the desk when she realized who the bellman was. "What are you doing here?" she cried.

"Just earning a living," Curt replied with a devilish grin. "I'll bet you girls are big tippers."

Curt pushed the cart full of bags toward a bank of elevators and the girls followed.

"So, where's Zack?" Lisa asked Kelly. "I'll bet he's getting cold feet."

Lisa's words made Kelly clench her hands into nervous fists. Until this moment, it never occurred to Kelly that Zack might back out. He'd been too gung ho about their marriage plans, too full of confidence.

"I bet the guys are in Mexico right now," Lisa continued as they waited for the elevator to arrive. "I wouldn't put it past them."

"Lisa, will you stop!" Kelly cried. "You're making me nervous." Lisa's words reminded Kelly of all the times that Zack had pulled crazy stunts. She recalled

all their breakups, too. Were they headed for another breakup now—a final one?

The elevator door slid open and Curt pulled the luggage cart inside. "Coming, girls?" he asked.

Kelly nodded and followed Curt inside.

As the elevator climbed the many floors, Kelly remembered how she'd worried that Zack might give up on her when he discovered she wasn't there. She'd worried that he might leave—and prayed he'd have faith in her.

Well, now it was her turn to have faith in him.

"Zack has become a whole new person since we fell in love," she said, turning to Lisa. "He's mature and responsible now."

"If you say so," Lisa replied doubtfully.

She *did* say so. But Kelly knew that saying it was the easy part. She had to believe it.

chapter 6

Zack paced nervously in his jail cell. There had to be a way out of this mess. And if anyone could come up with a solution, he was the man to do it.

Zack glanced at Slater and Screech. They sat side by side on a bench, looking depressed and beaten. There were two other men in the cell with them. One was large, with broad shoulders and a craggy face. He was leaning against the wall with a dirty-looking yellow legal pad propped up on one knee. He wrote carefully, stopping now and again to consider his words. Zack wondered what he was writing. *I probably don't want to know*, he thought. *He looks like a total psycho.*

The other man in the cell was short and slight, and wore a gray business suit. He sat at the far end of the bench Slater and Screech were sitting on, clenching and unclenching his hands anxiously. Zack couldn't imagine what he was in jail for. *Probably tax evasion*, Zack mused. *Or maybe for running a red light.*

Screech sighed loudly, distracting Zack from his thoughts. "I can't believe we're in the big house," he said dramatically.

"Shut up, Screech," Slater mumbled, propping his chin on his fists.

Zack crossed the cell and sat down beside his friends. "I've got to get out of here," he said. "I'm getting married. I can't be in jail."

"Hey!" barked the psycho cellmate. "Marriage is jail, buddy. Now, would you keep quiet? I'm trying to work on a sonnet here." He fixed the guys with an icy stare. Together, they slid farther down the bench away from him, which brought them closer to the man in the business suit.

"He's very rude, isn't he," the man commented.

"Yeah, but *you* tell him," whispered Screech nervously.

"What are you fellas in for?" the man asked.

"Nothing. It's all a big mistake," Zack replied.

The man nodded unhappily. "Me, too. My name's Herb, by the way."

The guys smiled and introduced themselves to Herb. "What did they get you for, Herb?" Slater inquired curiously.

The man shrugged his slim shoulders. "I went for a drive with my wife. Is that a crime?"

"Of course not," Zack said sympathetically. "They arrested you for that? What did your wife say?"

The man smiled a twisted grin. His eyes lit with a maniacal light. "Nothing. She was in the trunk."

Zack's eyes widened and he shrank away from the man. The large man with the pad chuckled darkly. "And they call me a psycho," he said.

Screech clasped his arm tightly around Zack's shoulder. "I'm scared, Zack," he whimpered in a small, trembling voice.

Zack nodded. He was scared, too. Even Slater—big and muscular as he was—looked afraid.

The man with the pad lumbered over to them.

The guys huddled together, intimidated by the man's size and fierce expression. What did he want?

"My name's Ray," the man introduced himself, sticking out a huge, weathered hand.

Trembling, Screech stretched his skinny hand out to shake. "I'm Screech," he said. "This here is Slater, and he's Zack."

Ray laughed, a deep rumbling laugh. "Screech, huh? How did you get a name like that?"

Zack got up and assumed a tough-guy stance. "He's been in a thousand street fights," he said, hoping to scare Ray off. "And every time, the other guy ends up screeching."

"Him?" Ray asked, pointing at Screech. "Really?"

"Hey," Zack pressed on. "His hands are registered."

"Yeah," Slater muttered under his breath, "registered at Wal-Mart."

Screech—with his overactive imagination—was immediately caught up in the charade. He got slowly to his feet and did his best imitation of a mean dude. He swaggered to the middle of the cell, turned, and then strutted back. "So, Ray," he said, tossing back his mop of curls. "What's it like in the joint?"

Ray chuckled. "Like you guys don't know?"

Zack laughed loudly. Slater and Screech joined in, laughing in loud, macho tones. *Good*, Zack thought. Ray believed they were really tough hom-bres. As long as he believed that, he'd leave them alone.

"Look, to make it in here, you gotta remember three things," Ray said when the laughter died down. "No ratting on your fellow cellmates. Don't ever show 'em you're scared. And never choose the seafood buffet."

Zack and Slater nodded knowingly. Screech sidled up to Ray and whispered loudly, "We're going over the wall at eleven."

Zack shot Screech a look that said, *Don't push your luck!*

"I always wanted to say that," Screech explained, shrugging his shoulders.

Inwardly, Zack cringed. Screech was blowing everything!

But Ray laughed uproariously, obviously thinking it was a joke. Screech laughed along with him.

Zack and Slater exchanged glances. How long could they keep this act up? It was going to be a *long* night in this cell.

Screech put his arm around Ray's shoulder. He was clearly caught up in the fantasy of being a jail-house tough. "Ray, baby," he said, "how about telling me some stories about your life of crime? Then I'll tell you a few of mine—if you think you can handle it."

Screech and Ray walked off to a far corner of the cell. Zack strained to hear what they were talking about, but Ray's back was to him and his voice was low.

"I hope Screech knows what he's doing," Slater said quietly.

"When does Screech *ever* know what he's doing?" Zack replied.

Just then Zack saw Ray hand something small and silver to Screech. His blood ran cold. Was it a knife? A file? What did he expect Screech to do with it?

In the next moment he heard the low hum of a musical instrument.

The silver thing was a harmonica, and Screech was playing it!

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen," Screech

belted out the words of the old gospel song melodramatically.

Zack and Slater rolled their eyes. Leave it to Screech.

When Screech finished the song, he went on to an instrumental rendition of it, improvising on the harmonica. Screech's off-key playing seemed to go on forever. Finally Zack couldn't take any more. "Screech, will you stop that!" he cried.

Ray held his large hand up to silence Zack. "Hey, I like it," he said. "Play it again, Screech."

Screech beamed at Ray. "Thanks, Ray." He went back to his harmonica, playing with even more enthusiasm than before.

Herb, the murderer in the business suit, leaped off the bench and twirled around the room. He stopped with his arms stretched wide. "Anyone want to dance?" he offered happily.

At that, Screech stopped playing. Zack and Slater moved as far as they could from Herb. Even Ray pressed his back against the jail-cell bars. "Now he scares me," Ray said.

At that moment, Sheriff Thorpe approached the cell. "Hey, you three new guys," he barked gruffly.

Zack, Slater, and Screech hurried to the cell door to hear what the sheriff had to say.

"I just got word from Sacramento," Sheriff Thorpe told them. "Guess that was your car after all."

"That's what I told you all along!" Slater cried in exasperation. "We're innocent."

Ray stepped toward Sheriff Thorpe. "What about me?"

"You punched out an ATM," Sheriff Thorpe said. "That's a big no-no."

Screech nodded vigorously. "A big no-no!"

Sheriff Thorpe glared at Screech. "Please don't help me with my no-nos."

Zack didn't want to be sidetracked for another moment. "So we can leave, right?" he cut in eagerly.

"Yep," Sheriff Thorpe concurred. "After you appear in court for your speeding violation."

"Court!" Zack cried. "I can't appear in court. I have to get to Vegas to get married."

"Couldn't he just pay the fine?" Slater suggested.

"We don't do that in this county," Sheriff Thorpe said, shaking his head. "But I might be able to pull a few strings." His eyes narrowed and he leaned in closer to the bars. "It's going to cost you, though."

"How much?" Zack asked.

Sheriff Thorpe smiled broadly. He was so close Zack could smell his coffee breath. "How much you got?" Thorpe asked in an oily tone.

"A lot!" Screech jumped in over Zack's shoulder. "Zack has twelve hundred dollars!"

Zack covered his face with his hands. When would Screech ever learn to keep his mouth shut?

"What a coincidence!" Sheriff Thorpe said gleefully. "That's exactly what it costs!"

Twelve hundred dollars! That was all the money Zack had in the world. And how could he give Kelly the wedding she wanted and deserved—the wedding he'd promised her? "No way!" Zack blurted.

Sheriff Thorpe backed away from the cell. "Well, if you'd rather spend your honeymoon here with Herb and Ray . . ."

"Do it, Zack," Ray urged him. "There's no price for freedom."

"Sure there is," Zack replied cynically. "Twelve hundred dollars." He hated to pay it, but he couldn't see any other way out. Sheriff Thorpe was obviously a crooked cop. In fact, Zack was willing to bet that Thorpe had never really thought the Bronco was stolen, that the whole thing was just a scam to get money.

Reluctantly, Zack pulled his wallet from the back pocket of his jeans. He took out the twelve hundred dollars and slipped it through the bars to Sheriff Thorpe, who grabbed it greedily.

Sheriff Thorpe unhooked a ring of keys from his belt and unlocked the cell door. "Your car's out front. We brought it in."

"Where can I reach you, Screech?" asked Ray as the guys started out of the cell.

Screech clasped Ray's hand in a prison-style shake. "I'm in the book, Ray," he said manfully.

Zack and Slater could only shake their heads. "Come on, Screech," Zack called.

The guys dashed out of the sheriff's office and piled into the Bronco. Slater snapped the keys up off the front seat, started the car, and tore out of the parking lot. "I guess you owe Lisa a dinner," Slater commented as they drove out of the tumbledown town they'd come through on their way in.

"Just drive," said Zack. With any luck, he'd arrive in Las Vegas before Kelly gave up on him completely.

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The rest of the trip to Las Vegas was like torture to Zack. Slater didn't dare go above the fifty-five-mile-an-hour speed limit, and Zack felt as though they were crawling along the seemingly endless highway.

Finally, after midnight, they arrived in Las Vegas and pulled into the Stardust Hotel.

"Remember, guys," said Zack as Slater slowed to a stop at the front entrance. "Not a word to Kelly about what happened. If she knew that our twelve-

hundred-dollar stash is now forty-three bucks, she'd kill me."

"What kind of wedding are you going to have for forty-three dollars?" Screech asked, climbing out of the Bronco. Slater opened the back hatch and pulled out their bags. Doormen rushed up to help with their luggage, but Zack waved them away. He couldn't afford to tip them. Right now he needed every penny he had.

"I guess you'll have to cut back on the ice sculptures," Screech mused as he hoisted his bag onto his shoulders.

"Thank you, Mr. 'Zack's-got-twelve-hundred-dollars,'" Zack snapped impatiently at Screech. "Look! I just want to stall Kelly until I can raise enough money for the wedding."

"Sounds good, but how are you going to do that?" Slater asked as they carried their duffels into the hotel lobby.

"I have no idea," Zack admitted.

Despite the late hour, the hotel was still bustling with people. Zack led the way to the front desk, but when he got there he realized that Slater was no longer with them. Searching the crowd, Zack spotted Slater gazing amorously at a gorgeous brunette dressed in a red tank top and miniskirt. She was making her way across the crowded lobby, but paused long enough to return Slater's smolder-

ing gaze. *Leave it to Slater*, Zack thought. He was always on the prowl. It looked as if he was about to get lucky, too. But just as Slater approached the young woman, she hurried away.

"What's with that look?" Zack asked, walking up to Slater.

"I'm in love," Slater sighed.

"So what else is new?" Screech quipped.

Suddenly a wonderfully familiar voice rang through the lobby. "You made it!" Kelly cried as she and Lisa made their way through the crowded room. Kelly's eyes were bright with excitement and her hair flew around her face.

In seconds, Kelly was in Zack's arms, showering him with kisses. He hugged her tightly, enjoying the feel of her soft skin.

After a few moments, Kelly pulled back a bit and looked searchingly into Zack's eyes. "Did something go wrong?" she asked.

"Yeah," Zack replied as their friends gathered around them. "We got stopped for speeding and were hassled by a county sheriff, but, hey, nothing is going to stop me from getting married."

"Oh, Zack, this town is such a rush," Kelly said breathlessly. "I can't wait to start planning the wedding." She smiled brightly. "I have so many ideas! That twelve hundred dollars is going to go fast."

"You have no idea," Zack muttered under his breath.

"We were going to get something to eat," Lisa told them. "A midnight snack. Want to join us?"

"I'm not hungry," Screech replied, patting his stomach. "They fed us pretty good in the slammer."

"What?" Kelly cried, alarmed.

"Uh, the Slammer," Slater said hastily, trying to cover Screech's blunder. "It was this funky Tex-Mex place in Barstow."

"You girls get started," said Zack. "We'll check in and meet you in the coffee shop."

Kelly studied Zack's face. "Okay," she agreed, giving him a smooch on the cheek. "See you in a while."

As Kelly and Lisa headed for the all-night coffee shop, Zack turned frantically to his friends. "Okay, guys, I've got to make some money, fast," he said.

"Why don't you try your luck at the tables?" Slater suggested.

Zack's eyes lit with enthusiasm. Of course! They were in Las Vegas—the perfect place to make money.

"Zack, you only have forty dollars," Screech reminded him. "You lose that and you won't even be able to buy Kelly lunch. Then she'll really be suspicious."

"He's got a point," Zack told Slater.

"Hey!" Slater cried. "I have some friends who made big money last summer caddying for businessmen. You carry their clubs, keep their scores, and make a couple of hundred in tips."

"If we all do it and pool our money, you can get your twelve hundred back in no time!" Screech enthused.

"It's settled, then," Zack declared. "In just a few short hours, we'll hit the links!"

chapter 7

At six o'clock the next morning, Zack yawned and leaned up against the golf cart behind him. It was too early to be awake, much less working.

"No sleeping on the job," Slater told him, nudging his friend's elbow and chuckling.

"The early bird catches the worm," Screech added.

With a sleepy nod, Zack straightened. "Yeah, and the early worm gets eaten," he mumbled. He was not a morning person to begin with, and after getting to the hotel late last night and meeting the girls for a snack, he desperately wished he was still snuggled under the covers. But the golf course got busy early, and if he wanted to make money without Kelly suspecting anything, he had to be there while she was still asleep.

The hotel had matched the guys up with three men who wanted to play an eighteen-hole round. After arriving at the course, they'd loaded

To Have and To Hold

up the golf carts with the players' clubs. Now they just needed the golfers to show and they'd be in business.

After a while, three elderly men in bright shirts, plaid pants, and golf sweaters came out of the clubhouse. "You must be our caddies," one of them said. He was short and had lots of snowy white hair. "You guys ever caddy this course before?"

"Yes, sir, many times," Zack lied smoothly, figuring that they had to sound as if they knew what they were doing.

A tall, balding man pointed to Zack. "I'll take him," he said.

Zack smiled and pulled his cart over to the man. "I'm Steve," the man introduced himself.

"Zack Morris at your service," Zack replied gallantly.

Steve waved Zack farther away from the others. "We're playing for big money, kid," he said quietly. "I want every advantage I can get, if you get my drift."

"Your drift is well taken, sir," Zack assured him, looking over at his friends. The short man with the white hair had chosen Slater as his caddy, and the third man, who was tall and dark-haired, had hired Screech. Both men had pulled their caddies aside and seemed to be having serious conversations with them. Zack noticed that Screech was nodding vigor-

ously, his curls bobbing wildly. Slater was just standing there looking cool.

When the men regrouped, Zack headed over to his buddies. "What were those guys saying to you?" he asked.

"Jim asked if I could swim," Slater replied, shrugging his broad shoulders.

"Al wanted to know if I could read greens," Screech added. "I told him I'd cut a lot of lawns in my day. But I don't think that's what he meant."

"I think they want us to cheat!" Zack said.

"Noooooooo," said Screech. "Those guys?"

Zack and Slater nodded their heads. "Yep," said Zack. "Those guys."

"Should we do it?" Slater asked.

Zack considered the situation. It would certainly be the easy way out, and he had to admit that he was known for taking the easy way out. "I don't know," Zack said. "But let's not worry about it for now."

"Right," Screech said brightly. "Let's not worry about a thing."

But in the first ten minutes of the game it was clear that things weren't going smoothly. On the first hole, Al missed the ball, sending a fat piece of sod into the air instead.

"Good shot, sir," Screech congratulated him.

"That was a piece of grass, you idiot!" Al snapped. "Can't you keep quiet?"

"Sorry," Screech apologized, confused. It looked like a good shot to him.

Al spread his legs wide and prepared to take a second swing at the ball.

"Stop!" Screech cried just as Al was about to swing.

Al was so startled by Screech's outburst that he lost his balance and fell over backward, right into a sandpit. "Wh-wh-what?" he sputtered.

Screech rushed to the golf ball and lifted it tenderly. "There was a ladybug on your ball, sir. I didn't want you to kill it."

Zack cringed as he saw Al turn bright red with fury. As usual, Screech seemed to be off in never-never land. He simply gave the ladybug a pat, then lifted it off the ball.

Those were the first bad signs. And as the game proceeded, things got worse. Jim shot balls in every direction and expected Slater to run for them. He had to climb a tree, crawl out on a drainpipe, and wade into a pond. And those were the balls that were retrievable. Jim was a terrible golfer! "I'm all out of balls," Jim told Slater at last.

"No kidding," Slater said wearily.

"Run down to the pro shop and buy me a dozen," he instructed, pulling some money from his back pocket and handing it to Slater.

Slater took the money and jogged off toward the hotel.

Zack sighed. Caddying was boring—and hard. And it was getting hotter by the minute as the sun rose in the sky.

"You guys take the carts and meet us down by the fairway," Steve told Zack. Zack smiled and nodded, relieved that he'd get to sit down for a while.

Screech hopped into the driver's seat of Al's cart. "Do you know how to work that thing?" Zack asked as he climbed into Steve's cart.

"Piece of cake," Screech assured him.

Zack stepped on the gas pedal and headed down the fairway, savoring his few moments of relaxation. After a minute or so, he glanced over at Screech. But Screech wasn't there. Looking around, he saw that Screech was way ahead of him.

He was driving much too fast, careening wildly down a grassy hill. And he was heading straight for a wide lake!

"Screech, slow down!" Zack shouted.

"I can't," Screech squealed frantically. "The pedal's stuck!"

Steering hard, Zack stepped on the accelerator and pulled his cart in front of Screech's, hoping to head him off before he drove into the lake.

"Heelllpppp!" Screech yelled. His cart smashed into Zack's at full speed, and the impact hooked the carts together.

A look of horror crossed Zack's face as he real-

ized that his cart was being dragged toward the lake. The carts were totally out of control, and the lake was getting closer by the second!

"Bail, Screech!" Zack yelled. He and Screech threw themselves out of the carts a split second before they hit the water.

Zack hit the soft grass and rolled, getting up on his elbows just in time to see the entangled carts sink slowly into the muddy lake.

"Uh-oh," muttered Screech as Steve, Al, and Jim came running.

"That was a thousand-dollar set of clubs, you morons!" Jim screamed hysterically, his face tight with rage.

Steve stood over Zack, waving his arms frantically. "You'll never caddy again in this country," he shouted. "You're fired! And tell that other jerk he's fired, too!"

Not saying a word, Zack climbed to his feet and helped Screech up. He didn't really care if he ever caddied again as long as he lived. There had to be an easier way to earn the money he needed.

Screech and Zack were quiet as they made their way back to the hotel. They were tired, and the morning had definitely *not* gone as planned. As they approached the hotel lobby, Slater came running toward them, carrying a package of golf balls in one hand.

"Don't bother," Zack called to him. "We're fired."

As Slater joined them, Zack noticed that he was grinning from ear to ear. "Didn't you hear me?" Zack said, annoyed. "I said we're fired."

"Oh, too bad," Slater replied. But he didn't stop smiling. In fact, Zack noticed that his eyes looked dreamy, too.

"What are you so happy about?" Zack asked.

"Remember that gorgeous girl I saw in the lobby last night?" Slater said. "Well, I met her again just now. Her name is Carla, and she manages the pro sports shop at the hotel."

"Did you ask her out?" Screech asked.

"Yeah," said Slater in a blissful voice. "She said no."

"What?" cried Zack. "Then why are you so happy?"

"Because I'm in love," Slater said with a ridiculous grin.

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Zack headed straight back to the room he and the guys were sharing, fell face down on his bed, and was instantly asleep. When he awoke several hours later, his friends weren't there. He found a note from Slater on his bedside table.

Zack, we're meeting the girls down at the pool.

—Slater

Changing into swimming trunks and a red T-shirt, Zack hurried to the poolside. He still needed a plan for earning money, but until he thought of one, he might as well have a little fun.

Screech and Slater were playing water basketball against Kelly and Lisa. Zack peeled off his T-shirt and jumped in.

Slater had the ball, and Screech was bobbing up and down excitedly in front of him. "Pass it to me!" he cried. "Slater, here!"

Slater pretended to throw the ball to Screech, but threw a hook shot over Screech's head instead, sending the ball to Zack.

Zack caught the ball and instantly tossed it over Lisa's head to score.

"No fair!" Lisa protested.

"Perfectly legal," Slater insisted. "Nice assist, Screech."

"I got an assist!" Screech said proudly. Then he suddenly looked confused. "What's an assist?" he asked.

"Eight to four. We lead," said Slater.

"Okay, Lisa," said Kelly. "Let's get serious."

Kelly and Lisa passed the ball back and forth several times. Then Kelly jumped up to make a shot.

Zack jumped in front of Kelly, then pounced down, dunking her.

"Foul!" Kelly cried as she came back to the surface, dripping wet.

"No harm, no foul," Zack defended himself.

"Oh yeah?" Lisa fumed. "How would you like us to do that to you?" Not waiting for an answer, Lisa jumped up on Slater's muscular shoulders. She'd caught him by surprise and was able to dunk him in spite of his size and strength.

But when Slater surfaced, he wasted no time in pushing Lisa under the water. And that was all it took to start a water fight.

After several minutes of splashing and dunking, the gang was laughing too hard to wage more water war. "That was great," Kelly panted.

"Anyone seen my nose plugs?" Screech asked, peering at the bottom of the pool.

"We haven't had that much fun since high school," Lisa added in between laughs.

"I know," Kelly agreed, putting an arm around Zack's shoulders. She leaned toward him and planted a kiss on his wet cheek. "Zack, did I ever tell you I love you?"

Zack checked his watch. "Not in the last seven minutes." He gathered her in his arms and gave her a tender kiss, enjoying the smell and feel of her. She was his Kelly, the most wonderful woman in the world.

When they finally pulled apart, Zack gazed into Kelly's trusting eyes. He couldn't let her down—he had to find a way to give her the wedding she deserved.

Reaching for Kelly's hand, Zack walked to the pool steps. "Oh, I almost forgot!" Kelly exclaimed. "I called a wedding coordinator, and we're meeting her tomorrow morning at ten. I think we can have a really nice wedding if we just stretch out the money."

"Right," Zack said confidently as a sinking feeling filled his gut. *What money?*

chapter 8

As Kelly dried herself off, she eyed Zack carefully. He was sitting at the side of the pool, slumped forward, with his legs dangling in the water. He seemed to be deep in thought.

Something is bothering him, Kelly thought. She'd known him for years and could tell when something was wrong. And in spite of his happy front, something was.

Is Zack having second thoughts about the wedding? Kelly thought with a pang. She loved him to death and really needed his unshakable confidence. If he wasn't sure, she might start to get scared, too.

He's probably just worn out from yesterday's long drive. If he was having doubts, he'd tell me. Wouldn't he?

Kelly glanced at her friends. Screech and Lisa were stretched out on lawn chairs with their eyes closed, sunning themselves. Slater was sitting on a chair as well. But his eyes were wide open and he seemed to be thinking about something, too.

Kelly smiled. She was glad Screech, Lisa, and Slater were there with her and Zack. They were great friends. And since her family couldn't attend the wedding, it was important to have close friends by her side.

Just then a shapely young woman with long, wavy brown hair stepped in front of Slater's lounge chair.

"You're in my lounge," she told Slater. But by the tone of her voice, Kelly guessed that she was flirting.

Slater grinned and moved to one side of the lounge. "There's plenty of room for two, Carla."

Kelly strained to hear as she perched on the end of the nearest lounge chair, drying her hair. Normally, she wasn't one to eavesdrop. But she just *had* to hear what was going on between Slater and this woman.

"Sorry I was a little abrupt in the pro shop," Carla apologized as she slipped into the lounge chair beside Slater.

"No problem. I like a challenge," Slater replied, his brown eyes twinkling.

"That's good to know," Carla replied.

"Must be exciting living in Las Vegas," Slater commented.

"Yeah," Carla agreed. "Sometimes a little too exciting," she added mysteriously.

Kelly stole a peek at Carla as she began to comb her hair. What did Carla mean by *that*? she wondered. What was Slater getting himself into?

Just then, Lisa plunked into the empty space on Kelly's chair. "Want to go inside and get some lunch?" she asked.

"Sure," Kelly agreed. "We can give Romeo Slater over there some privacy."

Lisa shook her head. "Do you believe that guy? We've been here less than half a day and he's already on the move."

Kelly laughed and got to her feet. "Screech, want to go get some lunch?" Kelly offered.

"No thanks," Screech replied without opening his eyes. "I'm catching rays."

"Don't let us disturb you," Lisa said, shaking her head.

"Zack," Kelly called as she pulled a T-shirt over her head. "How about you? Want some lunch?"

Zack jumped as if she'd startled him from a deep reverie. "Oh, uh, no. I'm just going to sit here a minute. I'll see you later, okay?"

"Okay," Kelly agreed, looking confused.

"What's with him?" Lisa asked as they headed toward the hotel.

"I don't know," Kelly replied with a sigh. "One minute he seems like himself, and the next he gets this faraway look on his face, as if he's trying to fig-

ure out something important. I just wish I knew what was bothering him."

They passed through the lobby, browsing in the shop windows as they went. Suddenly Lisa stopped short in front of the hotel jewelry store. "Look at that!" she gasped, grabbing her friend's arm.

Kelly followed Lisa's wide-eyed gaze to a glittering diamond sitting on a velvet-covered stand in the shop's window. Beneath the huge diamond was a small sign lettered in gold calligraphy.

"The Considine diamond—four million dollars," Lisa read breathlessly.

"I think I'll wait for the after-Christmas sale," Kelly commented wryly. She gazed at the sparkling gem. "Do you think someone is actually going to buy this?"

"Yeah, girl, my future husband," Lisa said assuredly.

Kelly laughed. "Well, mine sure isn't. I just hope we can stretch that twelve hundred dollars far enough to have a nice wedding. There are so many things I want—and everything has to be just right." Kelly paused for a minute, thinking. "Of course, this isn't the wedding I've always dreamed of. But with twelve hundred dollars it can be nice enough."

"Not for me," Lisa said as they continued down the hall. "When I get married, I want the whole works."

Kelly sighed wistfully. She didn't really care about being rich and having a lot of material things. Her family didn't have much money, but they were happy. And she knew that she and Zack could have a good life without a lot of money.

Still, she *did* want a nice wedding—something she would always remember. Was Zack worried that she'd spend too much money?

That had to be it!

Right then Kelly decided that she wouldn't spend all their money on the wedding. She could cut back. She could do without the personalized napkins. She could get a smaller bouquet than she'd planned.

And right after lunch she'd tell Zack the good news. She didn't need the whole twelve hundred dollars.

A simple thousand would do just fine.

chapter 9

"I don't know what to do," Zack sighed as he and Screech stood on the pool snack bar line.

"Oh, definitely go with the nachos and bananas," Screech advised.

"I'm not talking about food, dipwad!" Zack cried, throwing his arms out in frustration. "I'm talking about Kelly! She wants to get married in two days and I'm completely broke."

A short, dark-haired man in an ugly plaid sport coat and a sea green shirt polished off his hot dog and walked toward them. "Pardon me, boys, but I couldn't help overhearing your predicament," he said in a loud, nasal voice. "I tried not to overhear, but the words went right into my ear and slammed against my ear drum. I don't know, it's a curse. Anyway, I'd like to help the two of you out. Have you two very nice-looking gentlemen ever considered a career in the exciting and challenging field of . . ." The man looked around the snack bar and

cleared his throat. "Male escorts?" he finished in a low voice.

Zack and Screech looked at one another skeptically. Male escorts? Was this guy for real?

"Actually, no," Screech told the man.

"Yeah, it's funny how you never see a male escort booth on Career Day," Zack cracked. "Thanks, but no thanks."

"It's perfectly on the up-and-up," the man insisted. "You'll meet nice people."

"We said we're not interested," Zack said as he and Screech took their plates and headed to a table to sit down. Zack really wished the guy would get lost.

"Suit yourself," said the man, shifting into a nonchalant attitude. "The starting salary is two hundred dollars a date."

Two hundred dollars a date!

"I'm Zack Morris," said Zack, extending his hand eagerly. "And this is Samuel Powers."

"And I'm Burt," the man said. "Burt Banner. But you can call me Burt Banner. Oh, look at the two of you. I'll bet you young men have to fight women off with a stick."

"Well, in my case it's more like a twig," Screech admitted ruefully.

Burt instantly doubled over with loud laughter. "That's funny!" he said. "I like funny. Now, I run a

legitimate business. These women want someone to show them the city—no hanky-panky. When would you boys like to start?"

"The sooner the better," Zack told him.

Burt clapped his hands together excitedly. "That's what I want to hear. When I get through with you, you're going to be polished, smooth, and suave!"

"Wait a minute," said Screech. "I thought I was already smooth and suave."

Burt pointed to him and chuckled. "Funny! Funny! I like that."

"What exactly do you have to teach us?" Zack asked. Maybe this wasn't such a hot idea after all.

Burt checked his watch. "No time this afternoon," he said. "How about tomorrow morning? I'll show you then."

Zack considered his predicament—and the cash he would make. "Sure," he agreed.

The man fished a business card out of his pocket. "Meet me at the address on that card at nine o'clock," Burt told them. Then he moved away.

Zack was so excited he forgot all about being hungry. "This is great!" he cried, grabbing Screech's arm. "What a break. Let's go tell Slater the good news."

They hurried back to the pool where they found Slater, still snuggled close to Carla on the lounge

chair. Zack hated to interrupt. "Let's just wait here a minute and let him finish talking to her," Zack suggested to Screech as they came to a stop a few feet behind Slater's lounge chair.

"Can we move a few feet closer?" Screech requested. "I always like to hear a master at work."

Zack and Slater inched their way forward until they could hear Slater and Carla's conversation.

"How about dinner?" Slater asked Carla, unaware that Screech and Zack were eavesdropping a few feet behind him.

"Well, I'm not sure it's a good idea," Carla replied.

"Are you kidding?" Slater cried. "It's a great idea!"

"Okay," Carla agreed with a smile. "You're on."

"Slater sure has a way with women," Screech said admiringly. But Zack didn't hear him. He was too busy looking at two men in dark suits and sunglasses, who were huddled close together behind some bushes. One of the guys was huge, and they both had slicked-back hair. They seemed to be staring at Slater and having some sort of serious discussion.

Who were these men? And why were they interested in Slater? "Look at those guys," he whispered to Screech.

"They look like mean dudes," Screech noted.

Just then, Slater and Carla left the pool area

together, and the two men hurried down the path after them.

Zack raised his eyebrows. What was going on?

■ ■ ■

The next morning at nine o'clock sharp, Screech and Zack pulled up in front of a pink stucco building. BURT BANNER ESCORTS, read the sign over the glass door. "This is the place," said Zack to Screech as he paid the cabdriver with his few remaining dollars.

Inside, the guys looked around. The office seemed to be in an old dance studio with a full-length mirror against one wall. Pictures of male stars who were famous for their good looks were taped all over the walls: Fabio, John Stamos, David Hasselhoff, and Burt Reynolds.

Just then, Burt Banner came out of a small room tucked off to the side. Dressed in a pea green sport coat with a mustard-colored shirt and a plaid bow tie, his outfit was even uglier than the one he'd had on the day before. "Welcome, welcome," he greeted the guys. "Prepare to be transformed! An hour from now, you will no longer be regular Joe-shmoes. I will turn you into that irresistible entity known as a Burt Banner escort."

"I can't wait," said Zack drily, eyeing Burt's terrible taste in clothes.

"Neither can I," added Screech with true eagerness.

Zack checked his watch. He hoped this really *would* only take an hour. He had to be back at the hotel to meet Kelly and the marriage planner at ten o'clock.

Burt clapped his hands together briskly. "Let us begin!"

The time went quickly. First, Burt instructed them on social graces—everything from fashion to table manners. Then, he started working on their posture and speech.

"A . . . E . . . I . . . O . . . U," Zack practiced, reading the card Burt had given him in his clearest, roundest tones while he balanced a book on his head.

"How now brown cow," Screech practiced, also with a book perched on his unruly curls.

"Good! Very good!" Burt raved. "You two were born for this!"

"I knew I was born for something," Screech quipped as the book slid from his head.

"Well, now that you've got posture and diction down, let's review manners," said Burt. "Let's hear our list of 'nevers.'"

"Never talk about yourself," Zack volunteered.

"Good," said Burt, nodding.

"*Never* pick up a check," said Screech.

"Right," Burt said approvingly. "But that's just good life advice in general."

Zack searched his memory for the other tips Burt had taught them. "Never criticize, even if she has lettuce in her teeth or eyeliner on her nose."

"Excellent!" Burt praised him. "And never sneeze in her salad—you'd be surprised how often that happens." Burt clapped his hands. "Okay. We're ready for a dry run, Screech. Ooooh! That name! It gives me the shivers!"

"Call me Samuel, sir," Screech suggested.

Burt shook his head thoughtfully. "Samuel. No. It's too boring. You're going to be . . . SAMMY!"

Screech quirked his mouth, considering. Then he smiled. "Sammy, I like it."

Zack looked at his watch. *Ob no!* he thought. They'd already been there for an hour and a half! "Sir, I'm late for an appointment," he told Burt. "When do we start?"

"Tonight!" Burt replied enthusiastically. "Wait here a moment." He hurried off to the small office and returned carrying a large engagement book. "Zack, you're meeting your date at the Top of the Strip restaurant at eight o'clock. Be prompt!"

"Yes, sir."

"And Sammy, you be outside your hotel at six tonight."

Screech looked to his right and left with a puzzled expression. "Who's Sammy?" he asked.

"You are!" Burt cried, mildly exasperated. "Don't forget. Wait for a pink limousine."

Screech beamed from ear to ear. "A pink limo! Wow! I've arrived!"

Zack grabbed Screech by the sleeve and pulled him toward the door. "You may have arrived, but I haven't. I'm late, and Kelly is going to kill me!"

chapter 10

Kelly glanced at the door for what seemed like the hundredth time. Where was Zack? How could he be late for something this important?

She and Lisa were sitting at a small desk in the wedding coordinator's office. The wedding coordinator, Sue Keller, was young and pretty, and had lots of suggestions. The girls were looking through Sue's large book of floral arrangements, oohing and ahing as they went. One bouquet was more gorgeous than the next—and they *all* cost a lot.

"This one is beautiful," Kelly cooed, pointing to a photo of white roses mixed with baby's breath, freesia, and carnations.

"Of course, we'll color coordinate it with the tablecloths," Sue said with a gracious smile.

As Kelly looked at the floral arrangement she'd chosen, Lisa picked up another of Sue's thick photo books—one full of bridal gowns—and began thumbing through it. "Kelly, I've found the perfect

wedding gown!" she cried a moment later. She held up the picture so Kelly and Sue could see the flowing, beaded white dress on the page.

"You've got good taste," Sue said. "That dress costs three thousand dollars."

Kelly shook her head and laughed. Leave it to Lisa, with her expensive tastes, to pick a gorgeous three-thousand-dollar dress. But anything that expensive was completely out of the question. "Thanks, Lisa," Kelly said with a smile. "But I think that one's a little on the pricey side."

"Sorry," Lisa said sheepishly as she continued paging through the book. "Where do you suppose Zack is?" she asked after a few minutes. "He should have been here at ten."

"He'll be here," Kelly said, trying to feel as confident as she sounded.

"I don't know," Lisa teased. "He could be changing his mind about all this. After all, he *is* Zack."

Kelly didn't need to hear this right now, even if Lisa was just kidding. "Thanks for the reminder," she said with a sigh. "If Zack isn't here, I'm sure he has a very good reason."

Just then Zack burst into the room. "Kelly, I can explain!" he cried, rushing toward her.

"Zack, you're over an hour late!" Kelly exploded. "Where have you been?"

"I have an excellent explanation," he told her.

"This ought to be good," Lisa said, rolling her eyes.

Zack shot her an annoyed look.

Kelly waited, hoping that it *would* be a good explanation. She really wanted to believe Zack had changed his ways for good.

"I was running around town trying to get the right tuxedo. You have no idea . . ."

Kelly didn't buy it. Why did Zack need a tuxedo today? He had plenty of time to rent one.

Getting out of her seat, she pulled Zack aside to a corner of the room. "What's the matter with you?" she asked Zack in a whisper. "You've been acting funny ever since we got here. Is something wrong?"

Zack looked at her with wide-eyed bewilderment. "No, of course not!"

Kelly had seen that look of innocence on Zack's face before. He was a champion at covering up with a who-me? expression. If they'd just met, she might have bought it. But she knew better. Zack was hiding something.

But what?

Kelly could think of only one thing.

"You're not getting cold feet about getting married, are you?" she blurted.

There! She'd said it—her worry was out. Now she waited breathlessly for Zack's reply.

"Kelly, don't be crazy! I love you!"

Kelly let out a relieved sigh. Thank goodness!

Zack stepped toward her and gave her a soft kiss on the lips.

Kelly smiled. "This is really starting to come together," she told him. "I think we can do this for the money we have if we're just creative."

"Very creative," Zack mumbled.

Kelly didn't pay any attention to his remark—she was too swept up in her enthusiasm for their wedding. Now that Zack was there, everything seemed possible again. "We can get by with finger food. No one eats at weddings, anyway," she said. "And we can use the flowers from a funeral if the florist has one that day."

"Well, let's keep a good thought," Zack said drolly. "We can hope someone will die in time for our wedding."

Kelly rolled her eyes. Maybe it was a little morbid, but they *did* have to be creative. Flowers were flowers. Who cared where they'd been before they got to her? "Oh, I almost forgot," she told Zack. "I made dinner reservations at the most romantic restaurant in Las Vegas, the Top of the Strip."

"Great!" Zack said with a smile. But the smile quickly froze on his lips, twisting slightly so that it looked more like a grimace. "Wait a minute! Did you say the Top of the Strip?"

What was wrong with Zack now? Kelly wondered. Why did he look so panic-stricken?

Kelly nodded and tried to ignore the expression on Zack's face. "Eight o'clock," she said. "I got their best table."

"Eight o'clock? Kelly, that's too late to eat," Zack said quickly. "Everyone knows all the fresh food is gone by six. Let's change the reservation to four."

"Four o'clock for dinner?" Kelly yelped. "Gee, *that's* romantic. What are we going to do, help them set the tables?" Kelly studied Zack with narrowed, suspicious eyes. "Are you sure you're not hiding something?"

"Of course not," Zack insisted, his face all innocence again. "Eight o'clock. Top of the Strip restaurant. You got it."

Kelly kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Great," she said. "I can't wait."

That settled, they returned to the table where Sue and Lisa were still paging through the books. Over the next hour, they brainstormed and chatted about the wedding. Zack made some good suggestions, but Kelly couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. He seemed so anxious and worried. But if he wasn't getting cold feet, what could the problem be?

At the end of their meeting, Kelly told Sue she'd

be in touch—she needed to talk everything over with Zack before they made any final decisions. Sue said that was fine, and Kelly, Zack, and Lisa left the conference room.

"How about a little shopping?" Lisa asked as they headed into the hotel lobby.

"No!" Zack snapped nervously.

Lisa and Kelly looked at him curiously.

"What I mean," Zack said, "is that we need all our money for the wedding, Kelly."

"Oh, I know that," Kelly replied. "But I can window shop with Lisa. It doesn't hurt to look."

"I suppose," Zack agreed.

"Want to come with us?" Kelly asked.

"No thanks," Zack declined. "I have a big night ahead of me and I have to be rested."

"Oh, that's sweet," Kelly said, her blue eyes sparkling. "You want to be rested for our romantic dinner."

"Yeah, that's it," Zack said quickly. "You go have a good time. I'll see you later."

"All right," Kelly said as Zack gave her a quick kiss and stepped onto the elevator. "See you later."

"Come on," Lisa said as the elevator doors slid closed. "I haven't bought anything in twenty-four hours, and I'm starting to break into a cold sweat."

"Oh, Lisa," Kelly laughed. "You're hopeless."

They left the hotel and spent the rest of the day

browsing through the fancy Las Vegas shops. Equipped with her credit cards, Lisa bought a new suit, two pairs of shoes, some perfume, and a new necklace.

"I think we'd better get back to the hotel," Lisa finally said, staggering under the weight of her packages. Kelly took some of the bags, and together they trudged homeward.

When they got to the hotel, Curt was the doorman on duty. "Can I give you a hand with those, ma'am?" he offered with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"You again?" Lisa said as she gladly handed him her purchases.

Curt took some of her bags, then another armful from Kelly. "Hey, I do a little of everything," he explained playfully. "I've been employee of the month nine times."

"That's great," said Lisa, heading through the front doors. "Because this morning you were a lousy waiter. My waffles were cold."

"Come on, Lisa, give me a break," Curt implored. "I get off in a while. How about dinner? There's a four-ninety-nine prime-rib dinner at the Hungry Steer."

Lisa made her eyes wide with mock enthusiasm. "Really?" she said in a false tone of excitement. "Can I also hit the salad bar and get two desserts?"

Kelly smiled to herself. She knew Lisa well enough to realize that although she was giving Curt a hard time, she liked him—even if she didn't want to admit it.

"Why not?" Curt replied. "It's only money."

Kelly laughed quietly. Curt was certainly a good match for Lisa. Nothing she said bothered him.

"Okay," Lisa gave in with a sigh. "But promise you won't wear sandals."

"You're on," Curt said as they stepped into the revolving doors.

Kelly followed them in. As she pushed the door, she spotted Screech on his way out. And he was wearing a tuxedo!

A tuxedo? Screech?

Inside the lobby, Kelly told Lisa and Curt to go on ahead so she could watch Screech through the glass doors.

Maybe Zack had been telling the truth this afternoon.

He *was* going all over town looking for a tuxedo—but the tuxedo was for Screech.

Kelly moved closer to the window. She could hardly believe Screech had gotten himself a date. He was usually so shy around girls. And he had to be going somewhere really fancy if he was wearing a tuxedo.

Just as Kelly was about to go outside and ask

Screech where he was going, a bright pink limo stopped in front of the hotel.

Screech stepped forward off the curb to meet the limo. Kelly stared in amazement as a woman's pudgy arm, swathed in a magenta beaded sleeve, reached out and pulled Screech into the backseat of the fancy car.

With a squeal of tires, the pink limo sped away.

Kelly's jaw dropped. *What* was going on?

chapter 11

"Right this way," the maitre d' told Zack and Kelly as he led them to their table at the Top of the Strip that night.

Zack gazed around nervously. Was his date already there? He had no way of knowing.

All he had was a name: Katrina Voluptkov. Somehow he would have to find her—and do it without Kelly suspecting a thing!

"Look at this view," Kelly gasped, pointing out the large plate-glass windows that offered a panoramic view of Las Vegas's shimmering glamour.

Zack sighed. Kelly was so happy tonight, and she looked terrific. Dressed in a black minidress and pumps, she was even more beautiful than usual. He wished he could just sit back and enjoy a nice dinner with her.

He couldn't, though.

He had a job to do—a job that would pay him two hundred dollars. Two hundred dollars he desperately needed to put toward his wedding.

"Zack, did you hear me?" Kelly asked, obviously noticing his faraway expression.

"Oh . . . yeah," he said, taking his seat next to Kelly at the table. "Well, let's order." He glanced around for their waiter. "Waiter!"

"Zack, what's the big rush?" Kelly asked.

"I . . . um . . . uh," Zack stammered. His throat was dry with tension. Luckily, the busboy arrived just in time to fill their water glasses.

"Do you have another date?" Kelly teased.

Zack's water slid down his air pipe. How did she know? Who told her? Zack coughed, clutching his throat as he choked on his water.

Then, at once, he realized Kelly had just been joking. "Another date," he gasped, forcing a smile to his face. "That's a good one."

Checking his watch, Zack got up from the table. "I have to use the rest room. I'll be back in a jiffy."

Zack hurried back to the maitre d' stand. This was going to be the trickiest scheme he'd ever managed. But Zack was confident he could do it. He *was* the scheme-master, after all. And, he told himself, this time he wasn't really doing anything bad. He was just trying to find a way to give Kelly the wedding she deserved. What was wrong with that?

When he reached the maitre d' stand, Zack asked if Katrina Voluptkov had arrived. The maitre d' nodded and led him to the other side of the restau-

rant where a beautiful young woman in a sleek black dress sat all alone in a booth.

"Great," Zack muttered to himself. "She would have to be gorgeous."

For once in his life, he wasn't happy to see a pretty face. Katrina's startling beauty would make it that much more difficult to explain things to Kelly if—horror of horrors—he got caught.

He couldn't get caught. *I can't*, he told himself, pushing the awful thought from his mind. Somehow he would just have to get through this without being found out.

Taking a deep breath, Zack approached Katrina's table. "Hello. I'm Zack Morris," he said, extending his hand. "I'll be your escort for the evening."

Katrina threw him a dazzling smile.

"If I can ask," Zack said, taking a seat beside her, "why does a great-looking woman like you need to rent a date?"

"Excuse, but I speak just *leetle* English," Katrina said with a thick accent. "I Russian."

Zack smiled at her and nodded. "I'm going to kick your butt, Burt Banner," he grumbled, knowing that Katrina wouldn't be able to follow what he was saying. How *convenient* that Burt had forgotten to mention this little detail to him. It made everything a lot more awkward!

Zack had to laugh at himself. Here, all along, he'd assumed Burt had approached him because of his good looks and charisma. But Burt would probably have hired anyone who would be dumb enough to take the job. That certainly explained why he'd wanted Screech. With a quick, sympathetic grimace, Zack wondered what Screech's date could possibly be like.

Katrina nodded. "Burt Banner. I *keek* your butt," she parroted his English.

This is impossible! Zack thought. How was he ever going to get through this night with a woman who didn't even speak English? Somehow he would have to. "Let's order," he suggested to Katrina.

"Or-derrrr," she repeated.

Zack pointed to the menus on the table. "Food. Yum-yum," he said.

"Yes. Or-derrrr," Katrina caught on, picking up her menu.

It seemed to take forever to explain the menu to Katrina. Finally, though, the waiter came and took their orders. Zack excused himself, saying he had to use the rest room, and hurried back to Kelly.

"What took you so long, Zack?" Kelly asked as he slipped into his chair.

"Well, Kell, you know men's rooms," he laughed, "lines, lines, lines. Let's eat. I'm starved." He snapped up the menu on the table and pretend-

ed to read it. He already knew everything on it since he'd just explained it all to Katrina. "Okay. I know what I want," he said quickly, slapping the menu down on the table.

"Slow down, Zack," said Kelly. "Let's enjoy the evening. That Russian dish looks good."

"No, she doesn't," Zack fired back anxiously. Then he realized Kelly was talking about the chicken Kiev listed on the menu. "Oh, *that* Russian dish," he laughed nervously. "Oh, well, yes, it looks great."

After the waiter came for their order, Zack decided he'd better get back to Katrina. But that same moment, Slater walked in with Carla. The maitre d' directed them to the far side of the restaurant—the side where Katrina was waiting for Zack.

"Look, it's Slater and his date," Kelly said. "Why don't we ask them to join us?"

"I'll do it," Zack said, leaping to his feet. Speaking to Slater was a good excuse to get away from the table. "I'll be right back."

Walking briskly, he hurried across the restaurant. As he neared Slater's table, he overheard some of their conversation.

"I bet you've had your share of girls," Carla said seductively.

"No one special," Slater confessed. "What about you? Do you have a boyfriend?"

Carla seemed to consider this a moment. "No," she replied.

Slater noticed Zack coming toward him. "Zack," he called out cheerfully.

"Can't talk now, buddy," said Zack as he whizzed past the table to Katrina's booth. "I'm back," he said as he slid into the booth across from her.

"I *keek* your butt, Burt Banner," Katrina practiced her English.

"Very good!" Zack praised. "But that expression doesn't come up too often." As long as he was being honest, Zack decided to go all the way. "Katrina, I have a confession. I like you, but I'm getting married soon."

"Marry? Me . . . you . . .?" Katrina looked puzzled. Then she burst into a fit of giggles, which grew increasingly louder and louder.

Zack glanced around anxiously. He didn't want Katrina to do anything that would draw attention to their table.

Suddenly he froze.

Kelly was standing at Slater's table. It looked as though she was asking if Slater had seen him. When Slater shrugged and pointed in Zack's general direction, Kelly turned and began walking right toward him! "Oh no!" Zack gasped.

There was only one thing to do.

Zack ducked under the table.

As Kelly approached, Katrina broke into gales of hilarious laughter.

Zack sucked in a long breath and prayed Kelly hadn't spotted him. But a moment later her shoes appeared. She was right next to the table!

In a panic, Zack jumped up to explain, forgetting he was under the table. "Owl!" he cried, grasping his head.

Katrina laughed even harder. But Kelly wasn't amused. Not at all.

"I don't believe this!" Kelly cried.

Zack knew he had no choice now but to come out from under the table and face Kelly. "Kelly, I can explain," he said as he stood up to face her.

Kelly's eyes were full of anger and hurt. "Same old Zack," she said. "Hitting on another girl right in front of me. Lisa was right about you. I've been kidding myself all along."

"Kelly, you don't understand," Zack said desperately.

"Oh, I understand," Kelly scoffed. "For the first time ever, I understand." She turned to Katrina. "And you . . . you homewrecker," she accused fiercely.

Katrina just smiled at her. "*I keek* your butt," she said pleasantly.

Kelly's hands flew to her hips. "Oh yeah?" she

fumed, angrily accepting Katrina's unmeaning challenge. "Do you want to go at it right now?"

Zack was horrified. What had he done? "Kelly, stop," he cried, putting his hands on her shoulders.

"Don't touch me!" Kelly sobbed, pulling away from him. "I never want to see you again."

Hot tears rolled down her face as she whirled away from him and stormed out of the restaurant.

Zack stood, frozen, not knowing what to do. He'd gotten himself out of a lot of hot water back at Bayside High. But he had a horrible feeling that this time there was no way out.

chapter 12

"Cool, *Baywatch*," Screech said. He was surfing through the channels on the limousine's TV, taking advantage of his evening on the town. He'd never been in a vehicle with its own bar, phone, and television, and he certainly wasn't complaining. Of course, he wasn't too thrilled with his date. Diana Beaujolais was bejeweled, red-haired, and weighed two hundred and fifty pounds! To make matters worse, Diana Beaujolais was a woman who knew what she wanted—and she wanted Screech!

"You smell divine, Sammy," she said, mashing him into a corner of the limo with her enormous bulk. "What *is* that fabulous cologne you're wearing?"

Screech sniffed the air. "Nothing," he squeaked. "I spilled Lavis on my undershirt."

Diana ran her pudgy, manicured fingers through his curls. "It becomes you, Sammy."

Screech smiled faintly. "Thank you, Di," he said, feeling more than a little uncomfortable.

To Have and To Hold

"You are such a hunk," Diana giggled, feeling his chest and arms. "You must *live* in a gym."

"No," Screech admitted, keeping his eyes on the TV program, "but I can do five pull-ups. Six, if I get a boost."

"I'll give you a boost, Sammy," said Diana as she wrapped both arms around Screech's skinny shoulders.

She'd slipped off her shoes and used her big toe to turn off the TV. "Television is for the masses," she told Screech in a husky voice, "not for evolved people like us, Sammy. What's your pleasure tonight . . . chamber music, opera?"

"I hear there's a great video arcade downtown," Screech suggested.

Diana didn't seem to hear him or didn't want to. "I know!" she cried. "Do you tango?"

Before Screech could answer, Diana directed her driver to take them to a club. When they pulled up in front of the establishment minutes later, Diana yanked Screech out of the limo and pulled him into the crowded club. Latin music played over the sound system, and the place was packed.

Screech barely realized what was happening as Diana spun him out onto the floor with a single powerful twirl. Then she pulled him toward her again, clutching him tightly.

Saved by the Bell

"Dance with me, my darling," she gushed as she tangoed out onto the dance floor. Screech gulped. This was hardly the date he'd imagined!

■ ■ ■

Back at the Top of the Strip, Slater was engaged in breathless, nose-to-nose conversation with Carla. He'd seen Zack and Kelly's fight, of course, but knew there was nothing he could do about it. Besides, he couldn't bear to drag himself away from Carla. Not only was she gorgeous, she was smart and funny. And she seemed to think *he* was terrific. Slater was having a blast.

"So you're a college wrestler?" she said, flashing him a smile. "I guess I'd better watch out, or you'll pin me."

Slater gazed dreamily into her deep brown eyes. "If I'm lucky, you'll pin me," he replied, his dark eyes twinkling.

"Hey, I know this great club downtown," Carla said, sitting up. "Want to go dancing later?"

"I'd love to," Slater replied. He reached across the table and took Carla's hand, giving it a little squeeze. Carla smiled, and Slater smiled back. He was so busy smiling that he didn't notice the expensively dressed man with slicked-back hair charging angrily toward their table.

"Freddie!" Carla gasped, going pale when she spotted him.

To Have and To Hold

Slater jumped back in his seat. "Who's Freddie?"

The man planted himself, his legs apart and his arms crossed, right in front of their table. "All right, Carla," he snarled. "You've had your fun. Game's over."

Carla turned away from him. "Would you leave me alone?"

"In a word, no!" Freddie barked.

"Who is this guy?" Slater asked Carla.

"I'm her boyfriend, pal," said Freddie.

"Ex-boyfriend," Carla was quick to amend. "I told you, Freddie, I don't want to see you anymore."

Freddie shook his head. "And I told *you* that's unacceptable."

Slater slid out of the booth and stood in front of Freddie. "Listen, *pal*," he said, crossing his muscular arms across his chest, "the lady said she doesn't want to see you anymore."

"What are you, the lady's interpreter?" Freddie asked menacingly.

"Yeah. I am." Slater noticed that Freddie was a few inches taller than he was, but he wasn't afraid. Slater knew he could handle himself in a fair fight—and Carla was worth fighting for.

"Whoa, the high school jock thinks he's a tough guy," Freddie said scornfully. His eyes narrowed and his mouth twisted into a cruel grin. "Don't mess with me, kid," he warned.

As Freddie spoke, his face reddened and the

veins on his neck bulged. Slater winced. Maybe this guy was more dangerous than he'd first thought.

"Freddie, please," Carla begged.

Slater was determined not to back down, especially not in front of Carla. "Look, if you don't leave us alone, I'm going to have to escort you out."

Freddie laughed. "You're going to have to escort me out," he said, as if the idea was absurd. "I'd like to see that." He locked Slater in a steely stare, silently daring him to come closer. "Come on, tough guy."

Slater took a step forward.

Freddie swung at him.

Luckily, Slater was on guard. He ducked and came back swinging, landing a punch squarely on Freddie's jaw. Freddie crumbled to the floor in a heap.

"Oh no! Run!" Carla cried.

"Why?" Slater asked with a shrug. "He's not getting up."

Carla was nearly in tears. "Run!"

Slater still didn't move. He didn't understand. Why did they have to run? And why was Carla so upset?

She stepped away from the table and grabbed Slater's sleeve, pulling him along with her as she hurried past the other tables. Everyone was staring at them—and at the two men in dark suits who were running toward them.

Carla had spotted them, too, and her eyes were wide with fear. "Come on, hurry," she begged, moving even faster through the tables.

Slater still had no idea what was going on, but he had a feeling that the situation was serious. The guys coming after them looked dangerous.

They were getting closer, too!

Slater broke into a run with Carla by his side. Over his shoulder, he saw the two men crash into a waiter with a dessert-cart.

They raced out of the restaurant, through the kitchen, and into a gaming room, darting between the tables. Where was the exit?

Suddenly the two guys burst into the gaming room and spotted them.

"This way," Carla told Slater, pulling him down onto the floor.

"What way?" Slater asked.

"Come on." Carla crawled along the floor until they came to a door marked FIRE EXIT. She reached up and pushed open the handle. Together, she and Slater crawled through.

In the stairwell, they jumped to their feet. "Carla, what's going on?" Slater asked, panting.

"There's no time to explain," Carla said breathlessly. "We have to go somewhere safe."

"My room at the hotel," Slater suggested. "They can't get us once we're locked inside."

"Right. They don't know your name so they won't be able to find your room. At least I don't think they will. Let's go!"

□ □ □

Zack pounded on Kelly's hotel room door. "Kelly! Let me in!" He had to get her to listen. Things couldn't end like this—not over some stupid misunderstanding. "Come on," he begged. "At least give me a chance to explain."

The door cracked open, but the chain latch was still on. Kelly peered through the space, her face red and tear-stained. "What's to explain?" she demanded.

"She wasn't another woman," said Zack. He could see part of the room, including Lisa and two open suitcases on the bed.

They were packing!

Zack looked back at Kelly and his heart went out to her. She was devastated, and it was all his fault. It was time to tell her the truth. But it was so confusing that he wasn't sure where to begin.

"She was my date . . .," Zack began.

Kelly glared at him and began to turn away.

"I mean . . . not a real date . . ." he corrected himself desperately.

He could tell from Kelly's face this wasn't working. "You creep!" Kelly sobbed as she slammed the door shut with a bang.

"Kelly, please!" Zack cried, tossing his arms in frustration. A second later, he heard the radio in the girls' room playing loudly. Zack was being drowned out, because Kelly didn't want to listen anymore. And Zack had to admit he couldn't blame her.

Feeling defeated, Zack headed to his room, which was next to Kelly's. Nobody was there, and Zack breathed a sigh of relief. He wasn't in the mood for company.

A cool breeze wafted past his neck and Zack went over to the window, then stepped onto the balcony instead. Maybe some air would help him think.

Gazing out over Las Vegas, Zack decided that it had turned out to be a bad-luck city for him.

Then something caught his eye. Next to the balcony was a narrow ledge . . . that led right to Kelly's room!

She *couldn't* ignore him if he was standing on the balcony right outside her room. It was a little desperate, Zack realized. But desperate situations required desperate actions. He couldn't let Kelly get away!

Slowly and carefully, Zack stepped over the balcony railing and onto the ledge. Stepping side to side, he made his way toward Kelly's balcony—thirty-three stories above the street.

When he was about halfway there, Zack made

the mistake of looking down. His head began to spin, and he gripped the stone wall behind him with his fingers. *This is no time to have a dizzy spell, Morris*, he told himself. But it was a long way down. It took every inch of self-control to keep from falling. Zack forced himself to stay calm, to breathe deeply. There. That was better. His head felt a little clearer. After several deep slow breaths, things stopped spinning.

□ □ □

Slater and Carla raced down the fire stairs until they burst out a side door and into the night air. Heading down an alley, they came to the street behind the restaurant and Slater hailed a cab.

When they arrived back at the hotel, they wasted no time getting to Zack's room. Slater locked the door behind them. "Okay, Carla," he demanded. "We're safe now. Tell me what's going on."

Carla looked Slater square in the face. "The man you hit is Freddie Silver," she said after a moment. "He's a bad guy with bad connections. When I found out who he really was, I broke up with him."

"Yeah, but he didn't break up with you," Slater filled in the missing piece of Carla's story.

"He's a dangerous guy, A. C. Those two guys chasing us are his bodyguards."

"Great!" Slater said woefully.

Just then, someone pounded on the door.

"Hotel security," a man's gruff voice called.

Carla stepped toward the door, but Slater grabbed her arm. "How do we know it's really hotel security?" he questioned. "What would security want with us?"

"I don't know," Carla admitted.

The pounding came again, harder and more insistent.

Slater took Carla's hand. "Come on. We have to get out of here."

"But how?" Carla asked.

Slater drew her toward the balcony. Outside, the lights of Las Vegas shimmered.

Slater stepped onto the small balcony. "Out here," he said, stepping over the balcony railing onto a narrow ledge that ran all the way around the hotel.

"A. C., what are you doing?" Carla gasped as the breeze tossed her hair. "It's thirty-three stories down. You'll get killed!"

"I'll probably get killed if I stay in that room," Slater replied, flattening himself against the outside wall of the hotel. "And that goes for you, too."

"I know," Carla replied. But she didn't move.

"Come on out here with me," Slater encouraged, holding out his hand. "It's not that bad once you get used to it."

Anxiously, Carla looked back at the room. Then she slipped off her high heels. Holding them in one hand, she reached out to Slater with the other.

Slater gripped Carla's hand firmly as she stepped over the railing. "I don't like this, A. C.," she said, trembling.

"Don't look down," he advised.

Carla stared up at the sky.

"We're just going to make our way to the next balcony. Can you handle that?"

"It's better than getting killed," Carla said shakily.

Slater breathed deeply. "Here we go," he said, edging along the ledge. He'd heard of going all out for a girl, but this was ridiculous!

chapter 13

Zack took another deep breath. He was almost to Kelly's balcony, almost to safety. He just had a few more steps to go. . . .

"Zack!" a voice suddenly called out. It was Slater.

Startled, Zack stepped back—and almost lost his balance. "Ahh!" he cried as his foot slid out from under him. Frantic, he reached out for something to hang on to. He was falling! At the last possible second he grabbed on to the railing. He hung on to the balcony with all his strength.

"Zack, hang on," Slater urged as he edged closer to Kelly's balcony.

"Slater, you've got great timing," Zack joked nervously.

"Don't worry, buddy," Slater reassured him. "We can do this if everyone stays calm."

Suddenly Kelly and Lisa stepped onto the balcony. When Kelly saw Zack, she let out a blood-curdling scream. "Zack! What are you doing out here?" she cried.

Startled, Slater slipped, reaching forward and grabbing her balcony railing just in time.

"Kelly, I was coming to see you," Zack explained, still hanging by his arms.

Kelly came to the railing and grabbed his wrists. "This is all my fault," she said frantically. "I should've let you in."

"Kelly, that girl was nobody," Zack spoke quickly, afraid he might fall at any second. "I got stopped for speeding. We were taken to jail because Slater cleaned out the glove compartment. They took all my money and I'm dead broke. That's why I became a male escort. It was to get money for the wedding. Kelly, I love you. You're the only one for me!"

"I love you, too, Zack," Kelly replied. "Don't let go."

From the ledge, Carla sighed. "This is so romantic."

Kelly looked up at her. "Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm Carla . . . Slater's friend."

"Oh, that's right," said Kelly. "I remember seeing you at the pool today and—"

"You guys can chat later," Slater interrupted as he stepped onto the balcony and reached out a hand to Zack. "Zack, pull yourself up and take my hand."

His arms aching, Zack grabbed for Slater's hand.

It took a couple of tries, but he finally had a tight hold. Zack was thankful for Slater's strength as he hoisted him onto the balcony.

Panting, Zack wrapped Kelly in a tight embrace and gave her a long, lingering kiss.

"You should be kissing *him*," Lisa told Zack, pointing at Slater.

Zack turned to Slater. "I owe you one," he said.

Slater smiled and helped Carla over the balcony railing. "No problem, preppie," he said as the group filed into Kelly and Lisa's room.

"This is Carla, everyone," Slater introduced his date.

Everyone murmured polite hellos.

"Zack, I don't care if you're broke," Kelly said, reaching for his hand. "We'll just get married in one of those funky little chapels—a real quickie."

"It'll have to be a quickie," Slater said. "Someone's trying to kill me."

"What?" Kelly gasped.

"I'm never going on vacation with you people again," said Lisa with a frown as she sat down on the couch in her room.

"That's why we were out on the ledge," Slater explained. "We were being chased by a couple of thugs."

Slater turned to Carla, a look of confusion on his handsome face. "I still don't get it. Carla, why so

much heat just because I punched out your boyfriend?"

Carla sighed deeply. "Well, there's a little more to it than that," she admitted. "You see, a few days ago I walked in on a conversation I wasn't supposed to hear."

"Uh-oh," Slater groaned.

"Freddie came to Las Vegas to steal the Considine diamond," Carla revealed.

"That gorgeous diamond in the lobby?" Lisa gasped.

"That thing is worth millions!"

"Yeah," Carla said, shaking her head. "The minute I learned what Freddie was up to, I walked out. Well, I *tried* to walk out. Now he knows I know, and he's trying to shut me up."

Slater looked at his friends. "You guys have to sneak us out of here."

"Hey, you just saved my life. It's the least I can do," Zack said.

At that moment, there was a knock on the door. Everyone froze.

"Ready to go to dinner?" Curt called through the door.

"Curt!" Lisa cried softly. Her brown eyes lit up with an idea. "Curt knows every inch of this hotel," she said. "He just might be able to help us!"

chapter 14

"Follow me and stay cool," Curt said as the elevator doors opened on the lobby floor.

As soon as Curt had heard about Slater's and Carla's predicament, he came up with a plan. He left Kelly and Lisa's room for five minutes, then came back dressed as a bellboy, pushing an empty luggage cart.

He'd helped Carla and Slater climb onto the cart, then put suitcases and garment bags behind and on both sides of them, so you could only see Slater and Carla from one side. Then the group had headed for the elevator.

Staying close to Curt, Zack, Lisa, and Kelly followed him out into the lobby. Right away, Zack noticed the two suspicious-looking guys he'd seen spying on Slater and Carla out by the pool that afternoon.

It all began to make sense. They were the bodyguards Slater and Carla were fleeing, and they'd been trailing Carla all along because she knew about the diamond heist.

The bodyguards looked like mean, no-nonsense guys—and one of them was huge. Zack breathed deeply as Curt pushed the luggage cart through the lobby's automatic doors. He didn't want to think about what would happen if those guys caught up with them.

"Why are they staring at us?" Kelly whispered nervously, glancing over her shoulder at the two men. They were coming through the automatic doors, too.

"Because they know we're Slater's friends," Zack whispered back.

"Great," Lisa muttered under her breath.

"Your cars should be here any minute," Curt announced in a loud voice when they got to the curb. The bodyguards were behind them, so Slater and Carla were hidden. "I hope you've enjoyed your stay at the hotel."

A valet pulled Lisa's BMW up to the curb, followed by Slater's Bronco.

So far so good, Zack thought. We're almost there.

But at that moment, a long pink limo zoomed up to the curb and jerked to a stop.

A second later, Screech burst from the back door. Looking wide-eyed with panic, he raced toward Zack and the girls, his tuxedo wrinkled and his tie askew. "Zack! Help!" he cried. "This lady made me tango against my will!"

Desperate to get away from Diana Beaujolais, Screech ran into one of the luggage carts, spinning it around and revealing Carla and Slater.

Screech jumped back in surprise. "Slater!" he cried.

"That's him!" cried one of the bodyguards. "Get him!"

Zack knew he had to act quickly. "Get into the car," he shouted, shoving Slater toward the Bronco. He ran to the driver's side and hopped in.

The bodyguards weren't wasting any time, either. They were coming after the guys at full speed. But just as they reached the curb, Curt shoved a luggage cart in front of them, giving Slater the split second he needed to jump into the backseat of the car.

Then Carla bolted from her hiding place, pulled open the front door of the Bronco, and dived into the seat.

Out on the curb, Curt pushed a second, empty cart into the bodyguards.

"Wait for me, guys!" Screech shouted as he made a dash for the Bronco. He scurried into the backseat next to Slater just as Zack peeled out of the driveway.

In the rearview mirror, Zack saw a cab drive up in front of the hotel. The bodyguards pulled the cab driver out of the cab and tossed him aside. The

driver looked furious, but there was nothing he could do. The bodyguards jumped into the cab and zoomed out of the driveway after the Bronco.

Zack pressed his foot down hard on the gas and drove onto the main street, weaving in and out of traffic. "Is there a cab behind us?" he asked.

"There are about twenty cabs behind us," Screech reported.

Checking the rearview mirror, Zack saw that Screech was right. He'd just have to keep driving until he was certain he'd given the bodyguards the slip.

Slater craned his neck to look behind them. "They're behind us, about half a block," he reported. "Step on it, Zack!"

"I'm driving as fast as I can," Zack exclaimed.

"I don't get it. Why are you guys being followed?" Screech asked.

"It's a long story, Screech," Slater told him. "But those people are trying to kill us."

Screech grimaced. "Whoa! I should've taken my chances with the crazy tango lady."

Suddenly Zack slammed on the brakes.

"What are you doing?" Slater yelled.

"Red light," said Zack, nodding anxiously at the light over his head.

Carla glanced anxiously out the back window. "Uh-oh," she said. "We gotta run for it."

Zack peered in his rearview mirror. The bodyguards had gotten out of the cab and were running through traffic toward the Bronco. "Let's go!" he shouted, throwing open his door and leaping out of the Bronco.

About two blocks away, Kelly, Lisa, and Curt were following in the BMW.

Kelly gripped the steering wheel. She was driving as quickly as she could, but there was a lot of traffic. She just hoped she'd catch the Bronco before the thugs in the cab did.

"Throwing that luggage cart in front of those goons was really brave, Curt," Lisa said as Kelly darted in and out of traffic.

"Brave or stupid?" Curt said wryly. "I've seen those guys before. They work for Freddie Silver, and your friends are in big trouble."

"Darn it! I'm losing them!" Kelly cried as she slammed on the brakes for a red light.

"I know a shortcut," Curt told her. "Hang a quick right and cut through that parking lot. We'll catch up with them at the—"

Kelly didn't wait for Curt to finish his sentence. The light turned green and she floored the gas pedal, hung a hard right, and headed for the parking lot.

"Doesn't this Beemer come with air sickness bags?" Curt asked as he flew across the backseat.

Lisa looked apologetic. "Sorry," she said. "Hang on."

□ □ □

I don't believe this! Zack thought as he raced through honking cars. No matter how fast they ran or where they went, they couldn't seem to shake the bodyguards. "This way, guys," he called, leaping over a small foreign car and onto the sidewalk.

While Slater, Carla, and Screech followed Zack onto the sidewalk Zack spotted a neon sign for the Motion Picture Museum. *Perfect*, he thought as he headed inside. He led the gang to an area full of life-like wax figures.

"Wow," Screech said, pointing to a statue. "It's Rodney Dangerfield!"

"What are we doing?" Slater asked, confused.

"Here, put these on and strike a pose," Zack said urgently, pointing to a pile of costumes. "Now!"

Slater reached for a trench coat. Screech put on some white gloves and a top hat. Carla grabbed a blond wig and a big feathery boa. And Zack pulled on a white robe. In the next moment, each member of the group struck a pose.

A few seconds later, the bodyguards raced past, mistaking Zack, Screech, Slater, and Carla for wax figures. When they were out of sight, Zack let out a sigh. "I can't believe I came to Las Vegas to get mar-

ried and I'm running for my life," he said with a sigh.

"I know," Screech agreed. "There's so much I have yet to accomplish: graduate college, climb Mount Everest, pass my driver's test. Why *do* they put those parking cones so close together?"

"Screech, please shut up!" Slater pleaded.

Zack rolled his eyes, then turned to Carla. "Did you try going to the police?" he asked.

"I couldn't," Carla told him. "I've been followed twenty-four hours a day."

An angry-looking man hurried toward them. "What are you people doing here?" he asked, pointing to the gang's costumes. From his official tone, Zack guessed he was the museum's manager.

"Well, sir," said Zack. "These people are trying to kill us and—"

"And I'm just a big Liberace fan," added Screech, hugging a lifelike wax figure of the flamboyant pianist.

"Well, leave Liberace alone and get out of here before I call the cops," the manager huffed.

"Could you call the cops? Please?" Slater begged, clutching the manager's sweater.

"Get out! Now!" the manager shouted.

Reluctantly, the group followed the manager to the front door. "I guess we don't have time to meet Marilyn Monroe," Screech commented as he

lingered by the wax figure of the legendary blond star.

"Out!" bellowed the manager, pointing at the front door.

Zack stuck his head out and looked both ways. The coast was clear.

"All right, come on," he told the others. They stepped out onto the street, looking warily over their shoulders.

Suddenly the bodyguards raced out of an alley behind the museum. "There they are!" one of them cried.

Dodging people as they went, Carla, Zack, Screech, and Slater raced down the sidewalk. Ahead of them was the Stardust Casino, and Zack decided that a public place was their best bet. He headed straight for it, his friends right behind him.

The Stardust Casino was a football-field-sized room crammed full of gaming tables. Looking over his shoulder, Zack saw the bodyguards charge into the room. He ducked under a blackjack table, pulling Screech down beside him. Slater and Carla ducked under another table nearby.

"My whole life is passing before my eyes," Zack told Screech as he looked out at the sea of legs and shoes. "It's times like these that you realize what's really important."

"Yeah," Screech agreed solemnly. "Isn't it amazing how women's feet are so much more delicate than men's?"

Zack shook his head in disbelief. How could Screech even notice something like that when their lives were in danger? "Screech, what's it like to be you?" he asked.

"Funny, my dad asked me that just the other day," Screech replied. At that moment, a gambling chip fell to the floor right next to him. Screech grabbed it and reached up to give it back.

A split second later, a scream came from the woman at the table, echoing through the casino. Their hiding place was no longer a secret!

"Let's go!" cried Zack, jumping to his feet and pulling Screech out from under the table. They bolted around tables, looking for an exit. A few minutes later, they spotted Carla and Slater, who were motioning for them to follow them through a door. The foursome raced into the main entrance hall, and Zack sprinted across to the first door he spotted and opened it. They had to get out of the hallway before the thugs showed up!

"Hurry!" Zack called, holding the door open for the others.

When they were all inside, Zack glanced around and realized they were in a backstage dressing room. All around them, costumed showgirls fixed

their hair and applied makeup in front of brightly lit mirrors.

Zack cracked the door in the hall open and peeked out. The two bodyguards were in the hall, searching for the gang. They'd eluded them for the moment, but how long would it be before they barreled through the door?

Slater had been doing some checking of his own. "Zack, there's no way out of here," he reported.

"I want my mommy!" Screech whimpered.

Zack had an idea. It was a crazy idea, and a longshot. But it was all Zack had. "There might be a way," he said. "Follow me."

chapter 15

"There they go!" Kelly cried as she, Curt, and Lisa raced into the main hall of the Stardust Casino.

Out on the street, they'd caught sight of Zack, Screech, Slater, and Carla running into the gambling house. Throwing the car into park, they'd climbed out of the BMW and come looking for them.

But no sooner did Kelly spot her friends than they disappeared through the doorway.

"Maybe they went into the show," Curt suggested.

They followed him into a theater just as the curtain was going up. Lively music blared from speakers and a line of gorgeous young women in scanty, sparkling costumes paraded onto the stage. Tall, feathery headpieces balanced gracefully on their heads.

That girl on the end looks like Carla, Kelly noticed.

"Zack has pretty nice legs," Lisa commented dryly.

Kelly looked at her sharply. "What?"

Lisa nodded toward the stage.

Kelly's jaw dropped in astonishment. At the end of the chorus line Zack, Slater, and Screech stumbled along dressed as showgirls.

Despite the danger they were in, Kelly had to laugh. They looked so ridiculous!

Zack tottered on his high heels. Slater looked as though his costume would burst open at any moment. And Screech's headpiece had fallen over his eyes. He groped the air blindly, trying to keep up with the others.

The audience was laughing hysterically.

Kelly's smile faded when she caught sight of two people who weren't laughing—the bodyguards. She grabbed Lisa's arm. "We've got to help them get out of here," she said.

"I know a shortcut to the back of the stage," Curt told her. He led the way to the right side of the auditorium, then through a narrow hallway. They arrived backstage just as Carla, Slater, Screech, and Zack were hustled into the wings by the stage manager.

Thank goodness we got here before the bodyguards did, Kelly thought.

"What do you think you're doing?" the stage manager yelled. His show had been ruined, and he was fit to be tied. "I'm calling security."

Kelly's heart leaped with hope. Security! That was just what they needed!

"We're security," said a man's voice. Kelly whirled around and froze.

It was one of the bodyguards, and he was flashing an official-looking badge! "We'll take care of them," he told the stage manager.

"That's very nice," said Lisa, recognizing the man as well, "but we can take care of ourselves."

The second bodyguard stepped into Lisa's path. Lisa tried to get around him, but he blocked her way.

"Right this way, folks," the bodyguard said gruffly. As he spoke, he pushed back his jacket to reveal a gleaming holstered gun.

At the sight of the gun, Kelly gripped Lisa's shoulder. There was no use fighting. They'd been caught.

■ ■ ■

Twenty minutes later, the bodyguards hustled the gang into Freddie Silver's hotel suite. Freddie was sitting in the lush living room, looking very mean and very pleased with himself.

Kelly clasped her hands together to keep from trembling. Even though she'd never seen Freddie Silver before, she knew he was the man Carla had spoken of. There was something truly cold and menacing in his eyes.

"Well, hello, ladies," he smirked nastily. "If you wanted to be in show business, you should've told me. I could've pulled a few strings."

He leered at Slater and chuckled maliciously. "Your lipstick is smudged, sweetie."

Slater scowled angrily as he wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

"Let 'em go, Freddie," Carla pleaded. "They're not part of this!"

"She's right," Zack added quickly. "We don't know anything about anything."

"Yeah," Screech volunteered. "We don't care if you want to rob a jewelry store."

Everyone looked at Screech in disbelief, and Zack slumped back in his seat, covering his face with his hands.

"Tell you what," said Slater, pointing at Screech. "Let us go and do whatever you want with him."

"No one's going anywhere," Freddie said coldly. "Give me one reason why I shouldn't kill all of you."

"The three-strikes-and-you're-out rule," Screech offered hopefully.

"Shut up, you idiot," Freddie snapped.

Kelly had never met anyone as nasty as Freddie. But she still couldn't believe he was *all* bad. Maybe way down deep there was a touch of human kindness, too.

"Sir," she began. "Zack and I . . ." She paused to

give her fiancé a hug. "Well, we're supposed to get married, and if you could just . . ."

Freddie cut her off with cruel laughter. "You're so innocent. I like that in a girl. But, sorry, no one's getting married."

Carla tried next. "Freddie, please, just—"

"Just nothing!" Freddie snarled. "I'm calling the shots here."

"Mr. Silver, I think I can be of help," Curt said calmly.

"Really?" Freddie jeered mockingly. "And you are?"

"I'm Curt Martin, sir. My father owns the Stardust Hotel."

"Really?" Freddie said again. Curt seemed to have gotten his attention.

"Really?" Lisa echoed. "Why didn't you say anything before? I thought you were just a lowly bellboy."

"I don't believe in using my father's money and influence," Curt replied nobly.

"Why not?" Lisa asked incredulously. "It's the best kind of money and influence there is."

"You're so materialistic," Curt said, shaking his head.

"You just found that out?" Lisa laughed.

"Excuse me," Freddie interrupted irritably.

"Why don't you two save it for your journals. You, Martin, what can you do for us?"

"I've lived in the hotel since it was built," Curt explained. "I know the entire security operation."

Freddie leaned forward. He was definitely interested now.

"I can get you into the jewelry store and I can get you the combination to the safe," Curt continued.

Zack grinned and held up his hands agreeably. "Well, there you have it. Now, Mr. Silver, sir, if you'll just let us all go, we'll—"

"Not so fast, kid," Freddie growled.

"I'll do all that for you, but I want you to let everyone go, even Carla," Curt said in a firm voice.

"That's very noble of you, kid," said Freddie.

"But how do I know this isn't a trap?"

"Yeah," said Screech. "How does he know?"

Freddie glared at Screech. "I don't need your help," he said. Then he turned back to Curt. "All right. I'm going to take you up on your offer. But nobody gets out of here until we have the diamond and a clean getaway. In fact, all of you are coming along."

"Why?" Kelly asked.

Freddie smiled nastily. "You'll make great hostages in case there's trouble," he said.

chapter 16

Zack looked around as he tried to come up with a plan.

The gang was in an alley by the back entrance of the hotel's jewelry store. Freddie had let the guys and Carla change into normal clothes, but the gang hadn't had a chance to escape. And time was running out. Behind them, the bodyguards kept watch, making sure the coast was clear and that no one tried to get away. In front, near the door, Freddie stood clutching a walkie-talkie.

"I'm in. It's clear," Curt's voice crackled over the radio.

The next thing Zack heard was a gentle buzzing sound. Freddie yanked open the door.

Dressed as a security guard—one of his many positions at the hotel—Curt had taken over the night shift at the jewelry store.

Freddie went in quickly. "Get going," one of the bodyguards growled, shoving Slater along roughly. "Inside."

The store was dark and quiet. Although the main lobby stayed fairly busy all night, the shop concourse shut down. The light in the hallway outside the store was dim, and nobody was around.

"Okay," Freddie said in a low voice. "We're going to do this like we went over it. Remember, if anyone of you screws up, you all get hurt."

Freddie nodded to Curt, who had sent the regular security guard home. Curt led the group through the store and down a flight of stairs.

"Come on, come on," said a bodyguard gruffly as he pushed them along.

The downstairs room had a small storage area and a large walk-in vault. As soon as the group was inside, a bodyguard beckoned for the girls to sit together in a corner. He stood in front of them, a gun in his hand.

Kelly looked at Zack with wide, helpless eyes, and his heart leaped to his throat. He had to come up with a plan! *Think, Zack. Think!* he urged himself. There had to be a way out of this. . . .

Freddie turned to Curt. "Okay, hotshot, you're on. Get us into the vault."

"I just want you to know," Screech spoke up in a warning tone. "If anything happens to us, my aunt is Attorney General Janet Reno."

Freddie smirked. "I'm shaking, kid."

Zack watched Curt intently as he approached

the vault. He pressed several numbers into a keypad on the wall, and the alarm light switched off.

"Now for the combination," Curt said, taking a piece of paper from his shirt pocket.

Everyone watched in suspenseful silence as Curt turned the vault's tumbler. A few seconds later he hit the last number.

Freddie and his men leaped to the door, turning the vault's heavy wheel. "Bingo!" Freddie exulted when the door swung open.

Curt stepped into the vault and snapped on a light.

Zack craned his neck to see what was inside. The huge Considine diamond sparkled atop its velvet perch. Around it, several other pieces of expensive jewelry glittered.

"What a haul!" Freddie exclaimed. "No sense leaving any of it behind." He glared over his shoulder at his hostages. "You kids get over there and keep quiet," he ordered.

While one of the guards kept watch over the kids, the other stepped into the vault to help Freddie.

"You, too," Freddie barked at Curt. "Go with your friends. I don't need you anymore."

Zack watched as Freddie and his bodyguard piled jewelry into a gym bag. Would Freddie really let them go after this was over? Somehow, he doubted it.

"You guys aren't going to get away with this," Carla declared.

"You'd better hope we get away with this," the bodyguard in front of them sneered.

At that moment, Zack was struck with an inspiration. If he could get Screech and Slater to play along, he had a plan that just might work. But he had to let his friends know what he was up to without tipping off the bodyguard.

"Hey, Slater," Zack said, nodding toward the bodyguard's gun. "Do you think that gun has paint in it?"

A twinkle of understanding glimmered in Slater's eyes. "I don't know," he replied. "Let's ask him."

"Does that gun have paint in it?" Zack asked the bodyguard. "Does it shoot paint?"

"No, stupid," the bodyguard replied impatiently. "It shoots bullets." He jerked his gun menacingly at Zack. "Do you want to see?"

Zack raised a hand and waved the gun away. "This is all your fault, Slater," he accused his friend.

"My fault?" Slater cried, stepping closer to Zack. "You're the one who dragged us to Vegas. Remember?"

Zack gestured angrily toward Carla. "But it's your girlfriend here that got us into this."

The bodyguard narrowed his eyes at them. "Stop it! Both of you!"

Screech stepped forward between Zack and Slater. "Let me handle this," he said diplomatically. "You have to know how to talk to them."

Zack gave Screech a slight nod. He was on the right track now.

"Stop it! Both of you," Screech said, mimicking the bodyguard's rough tone.

"Oh yeah?" said Slater, shoving Screech toward Zack.

Screech stumbled into Zack, and Zack pushed him back into Slater.

"Stop it! You'll ruin my clothes," Screech protested, as he was thrown back and forth.

The bodyguard stepped toward them. "All right. That's it. Break it up," he ordered.

At that moment, Zack saw his chance. With all his strength, he pushed Screech into the bodyguard.

As the gun clattered to the floor, Zack and Slater gave the bodyguard a double-fisted punch in the nose. In a flash, Kelly snatched up the gun from the floor, while the guys hurtled the doubled-over guard into the vault. "Hey, what's going on?" Freddie shouted as they slammed the vault door shut.

With lightning movements, Curt pressed numbers into the keypad, locking Freddie and his thugs securely inside the vault.

"That was great, you guys!" Carla cheered.

Lisa laughed and shook her head. "Yeah. Who would've thought that stupid Three Stooges routine would actually work again?"

"I've always said that Moe's a genius," Screech said happily as he exchanged handshakes and high fives with Zack and Slater.

"Well, it was pretty brave," Kelly said, sidling up to Zack. "And you know how bravery turns me on." She wrapped her arms around him and brushed her lips against his, savoring the tingling sensation that raced up her spine.

Their friends groaned as the happy couple kissed, but Zack couldn't have cared less. After everything that had happened, it was wonderful to have Kelly in his arms and know that she loved him as much as ever.

"This is security," Curt said into his two-way radio. "We have a break-in at the jewelry store. I need full response."

"Is there another vault we can lock *them* into?" Lisa asked, pointing to Zack and Kelly.

Zack and Kelly ignored her. Now that all this was over, they could finally do what they'd come to Nevada to do. Money or no money, Zack was not leaving Las Vegas without marrying Kelly!

chapter 17

Zack checked the expression on Kelly's face. He couldn't quite read it. Was she happy? Nervous? Disappointed?

He couldn't blame her if she was a little disappointed. Getting married in a quick-wedding mill like this—with both of them dressed in jeans and T-shirts—definitely wasn't the kind of wedding she'd always dreamed of. It wasn't what Zack wanted, either.

Zack looked around and frowned. The place was totally tacky, with ugly paintings and hideous wallpaper. Behind them, several other couples—dressed in everything from black motorcycle jackets to Elvis costumes to tuxedos and white dresses—held numbers, as if they were in line at the deli. The entire crowd was waiting to get married.

Zack and Kelly were next on line, waiting patiently with the rest of the gang.

Peeking into the next room, Zack saw a very elderly couple—probably in their late eighties or nineties—getting married.

He jumped back when he got a look at the justice of the peace performing the ceremony. It was Burt Banner—the man who ran the escort business!

That sleaze! Zack thought in dismay. Dressed in a silver tuxedo and an orange ruffled shirt, Burt stood next to a wooden podium with a large green cash box on top.

He was going to marry Kelly and Zack!

How depressing! Zack thought. Could anything be less dignified?

But Kelly had insisted that the important thing was getting married. She said the ceremony didn't matter at all.

Did she mean it?

Zack knew that Kelly was a good sport. It was one of the things he loved about her. But was it fair to make her be a good sport about this—about one of the most important events in her life?

The elderly couple came out of the chapel room, smiling and gazing into one another's eyes.

"Number sixty-one," Burt bellowed from the other room. "Number sixty-one is next!"

"Bingo!" said Zack, holding up his ticket with the number sixty-one printed on it.

Kelly shot him a slightly nervous smile and took his hand. Together they went into the chapel room, followed by the rest of the gang.

The chapel room was even tackier than the wait-

ing room, with purple walls and unnatural-looking plastic flowers. A garish fluorescent light shone harshly overhead, giving off an audible buzz.

When Burt Banner spotted Zack, he stepped back in surprise. "Hey, it's you," he said, staring at Zack. Then he spotted Screech. "And Sammy, well, well."

At that moment, Zack recalled how he'd run out on Katrina, leaving her in the restaurant. Had she complained to Burt? Was Burt angry with Zack? And what about the way Screech had run out on his date?

Would Burt refuse to marry them? Being rejected by this place would be an all-time low.

But Burt didn't seem to be angry as he smiled at Kelly. In fact, his escort company appeared to be the farthest thing from his mind. Zack wondered if he'd gone out of business. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Hey, I'm in a lot of service businesses," Burt replied gallantly. "I also sell used cars and own a budget funeral parlor. You'd be surprised how many people drop dead in Las Vegas."

"We'll just take the wedding, please," Kelly said with an amused smile.

That was Kelly. Always making the best of any situation. Zack couldn't ask for a more wonderful woman to share his life.

"Kel, I know this isn't how you planned it," Zack

said softly, taking her hand. "I promise I'll make it up to you."

Kelly squeezed his hand reassuringly. "The important thing is that we're getting married," she said, looking up at him.

"That is the important thing," Burt agreed. "But here's something even more important. I'll need the marriage license and fifty bucks, not necessarily in that order."

Zack took the license from the back pocket of his jeans, and turned to Slater, who handed Burt a fifty-dollar bill.

"You know," Burt added. "If you want to make it fifty-five I can throw in a shiatsu massage."

Zack shook his head.

"Okay," said Burt, slipping the fifty into the pocket of his tuxedo jacket. "We're gathered here"—Burt sighed impatiently—"blah, blah, blah, perfect union."

Zack frowned at him. Could this get any worse? Burt couldn't even be bothered to say the right words!

Burt took no notice of Zack's disapproving stare. "Do you, Zack Morris, and do you, Kelly Kapowski, promise to love and to cherish in health and sickness, in sickness and death, in death and rigor mortis, and then come back and walk the earth as zombies," he paused to catch his breath. "Ah, just say 'I do,'" he finished.

In spite of Burt's strange ceremony, Kelly and Zack looked at one another and smiled. "I do," they said together.

"Survey said . . . right answer," Burt shouted, imitating a game show host. "So, if no one here objects, I now pronounce you . . ."

"I object!" came a voice from the back of the room.

Zack whirled around in surprise and dismay. When he saw his parents standing at the back of the room, his jaw dropped.

"Man and . . . what?" Burt stammered, thrown off by the unexpected interruption.

Zack couldn't believe this! His father had come all this way to object? Wasn't it bad enough that he wouldn't give his approval? Did he have to try to ruin *everything*?

"You . . . you . . . object?" Burt sputtered. "But no one ever objects. Are you sure?"

"Yes," Mr. Morris spoke firmly as he strode toward Zack and Kelly. "No son of mine is going to be married in a cheesy place like this."

"Hey," Burt protested, insulted. "How can you call this cheesy? I just redecorated."

Zack put his arm protectively around Kelly. No matter what, he wouldn't let his father stop them from getting married.

Mr. Morris faced them, his face serious. "Zack, Kelly, I want you to have a real wedding."

Saved by the Bell

It took Zack a minute to realize what his father was saying. By the time he did, the whole gang was cheering and Kelly's face was alight with happiness.

"I don't know what to say," Zack said as he gave his father a hug. Of all the things his dad had done for him through the years, this was the greatest. "I'm glad you changed your mind."

"I got some last-minute wisdom from an old friend," Mr. Morris admitted, glancing toward Slater.

"I had to call him," Slater confessed sheepishly.

Zack extended his hand to his friend. "I'm glad you did."

As Zack looked around the room, he was suddenly filled with gratitude. He had friends like Slater and Screech, who'd stuck by him through all the craziness of the last two days. The greatest woman in the world was going to be his bride. And now his mother and father were coming through for him in a way he'd never expected.

"Give your mom and me a couple of days and we'll have a first-class wedding," Mr. Morris told Zack.

"I've already started the ball rolling," his mother added with a grin.

Zack noticed a shifty look come over Burt's face as he pulled the fifty-dollar bill out of his shirt pocket and tried to slip it into the metal cash box on the podium without being seen.

To Have and To Hold

Kelly quickly snapped the fifty from Burt's greedy hands. "I believe that belongs to us," she said.

That's my Kelly, Zack thought proudly.

Burt shook his head. "I'm sticking to funerals," he said. "They never ask for refunds."

chapter 18

Kelly blinked back tears of joy. Two days before, she'd told herself she didn't care if she had the wedding she'd always dreamed of. She'd convinced herself it didn't really matter.

But it had mattered. Deep down, she was totally disappointed. Getting married in a tacky wedding mill hundreds of miles away from the people she loved would have been awful.

Now everything was different. Everything was perfect.

Zack's parents had put together a lovely wedding in only two days, just as they'd promised. And now she stood on the lawn of the Hilton Hotel, dressed in a long white gown and crowned with a flowing veil of white netting. It was a gorgeous day, with a blue sky and a light breeze. And the two days had even given their friends and Kelly's family time to drive to Las Vegas to be part of the wedding, so everyone was there to share in the celebration. Well,

almost everyone. Jessie Spano, one of Kelly's best friends from Bayside, couldn't make it. Kelly had wanted her to be a bridesmaid, but Jessie was in the middle of exams and couldn't get away from school in New York. Still, almost everyone who was important had been able to come.

And instead of a money shark in a tacky tuxedo, a minister patiently stood at the end of the red-carpeted aisle—along with her handsome groom, Zack.

"Ready?" Kelly's father asked, taking her arm.

Kelly beamed at him. "Ready," she said, glancing down at her bouquet of white roses.

While a pianist played the wedding march, Kelly and her dad walked gracefully down the aisle. As Kelly moved forward, she glanced from side to side at the smiling faces of the guests they'd invited to the wedding.

Her friend Alex from Cal U sat dabbing her eyes with Kleenex. "This is just so beautiful," she sobbed.

"I know," Mr. Belding, Bayside's principal, sniffed. "I love weddings."

"I was their suitemate at college," Alex said with a snuffle.

"I was their high school principal," Mr. Belding said.

"Cut it out, would you?" Mike Rogers, the dorm monitor from Cal U, declared. His eyes were already tearing up. "I was their resident advisor," he added.

"I kind of introduced them, you know," Mr. Belding went on in a choked whisper. "They became a couple in my school, after all."

Kelly smiled as she walked past them. She was almost to the end of the aisle, where Zack waited for her, looking spectacular in his morning coat. At his side—in tuxedos—were his two best men, Screech and Slater. Opposite them stood Lisa, her maid of honor, dressed in an elegant peach-colored dress.

Near the front of the aisle, Kelly nodded at her mother and Mrs. Morris, who sat side by side. Then she joined Zack at the end of the aisle, taking his hand and turning to face the minister.

"We are gathered here today to witness the union of a very two very special people, Zack Morris and Kelly Kapowski," the minister began, taking his time. *Now this is the way a wedding should be*, Kelly thought happily.

"Wait!" a voice called out suddenly. "Wait for me!" Everyone turned to see Jessie Spano running up the aisle, trying to put on her high-heeled shoes.

"Jessie!" Kelly cried. "How did you get here?"

Jessie grinned. "When your mom called, I took the first flight out of New York," she replied, her hazel eyes twinkling. "I couldn't let you guys get married without me."

"But what about your finals?" Zack asked.

Jessie waved a hand through the air. "So I'll go to summer school," she said. "Some things are more important than tests."

Kelly smiled and gave Jessie a hug. Now everything was *really* perfect.

Jessie took her place next to Lisa, and the ceremony continued.

"Kelly and Zack, Zack and Kelly," the minister said. "Two people destined for each other."

Destined for each other. Kelly ran the words over again in her head. She supposed they were. Looking back, it certainly seemed that way.

Kelly remembered all the wonderful times they'd had. Sure, there had been some bad times, too. But she'd never felt so alive, so happy, as when she was with Zack. And now she and Zack would be together forever.

"May I have the ring, please," the minister requested.

Zack turned to Slater, and Slater turned to Screech.

Screech searched his pockets frantically. "I had it a minute ago!" he said in a panicked voice.

Slater grabbed Screech's hand—Screech was wearing the ring! He quickly took it off and gave it to the minister, who handed it to Zack.

Kelly extended her hand, and Zack slipped the ring onto her finger.

"Do you, Kelly, take Zack to be your lawful wedded husband?" the minister asked.

"I do," Kelly replied, looking lovingly into Zack's smiling eyes.

"Do you, Zack, take Kelly to be your lawful wedded wife?" asked the minister.

"I do," Zack replied.

"By the power invested in me by the state of Nevada, I now pronounce you husband and wife," the minister concluded. "You may kiss the bride."

This time when Zack and Kelly kissed, there was no groaning. Everyone broke into enthusiastic applause.

A moment later, the pianist began to play and Kelly and Zack walked back down the aisle, waving to their guests. They had done it! Kelly couldn't remember ever being happier. And from the look on Zack's face, he felt exactly the same way.

■ ■ ■

At the reception, Zack and Kelly greeted their guests while waiters and waitresses passed hors d'oeuvres.

"Alex! I can't believe you made it!" Kelly exclaimed as her suitemate approached.

"Hey, when Slater called me, I jumped on the next plane," she replied, giving Zack and Kelly a hug. "I wouldn't have missed this for anything—"

Zack actually committing to one woman was something I just *bad* to see."

"All right, all right," Zack laughed. "I got enough of that from Lisa."

"I wish you guys all the happiness in the world," Alex said sincerely. "And don't forget, I'm right across the campus from you."

"We won't," Kelly assured her as Alex moved aside to let other well-wishers congratulate the bride and groom.

Mike Rogers was next on line. Dressed in a chocolate-colored suit, he looked sharp. "Congratulations, you two," he said, hugging them.

"Thanks, Mike," Kelly said with a smile.

"I'm going to miss you both in the dorms," he admitted. "Things just won't be the same without you."

"If it will make you feel better, you can come by our apartment once a week and yell at us for being too messy," Zack joked.

"Count on it," Mike said with a wink as he moved away.

The next to congratulate them was Mr. Belding, still teary-eyed.

"Mr. Belding, I'm so touched that you came to our wedding," Kelly told him warmly.

"Well, you've always been special to me," Mr.

Belding said, his eyes misting up all over again. He put his hand on Zack's shoulder. "And Zack, if it wasn't for you . . . I'd have a lot more hair and a few less ulcers."

"What can I say, sir," said Zack, with a grin. "You made high school challenging."

"I did?" Mr. Belding sounded a little surprised. "Thanks, Zack."

Kelly laughed to herself. She never thought she'd see the day when Zack and Mr. Belding were fondly remembering the days Zack had driven Mr. Belding crazy.

Come to think of it, there had been times when Kelly doubted that she and Zack would be husband and wife—whenever Zack schemed behind her back, or when they were being held at gunpoint by Freddie's bodyguard. But in spite of everything they were here, and they were married.

"Best of luck to you two," Mr. Belding said. "And don't forget to come back and visit me at Bayside."

Kelly kissed Mr. Belding's cheek before he rejoined the other guests.

"Zack," Jessie said, coming up behind them. "You'd better take good care of Kelly, or you'll hear from me," she said teasingly.

Zack held up his hands in mock defense and smiled. "Anything but that," he said. "I'm going to

go say a few words to our guests," Zack told Kelly. "Okay?"

"Sure," Kelly agreed as Zack moved away.

Jessie turned to Kelly, her eyes glistening with tears. "Well?" she began. "Mrs. Morris?" She took Kelly's hands in hers. "What can I say?"

The two girls smiled at each other, and Kelly gave Jessie a hug. It was great to have her here.

"Excuse me, everybody," Zack called out.

While the happily chatting guests quieted and gave Zack their attention, Kelly made her way to her husband's side.

"I just want to say to all our friends and family how happy Kelly and I are that you all could be here today," he said. "You've made this event a truly special one."

"And please don't be strangers," Kelly added. "We want to see all of you in our new apartment."

"But not at the same time," Zack quickly amended, which caused a ripple of laughter among the guests.

"Thanks so much," said Kelly. "We love you all."

Slater stepped forward and raised a toast to the bride and groom. "I would like to say a few words about my buddies Zack and Kelly," he began. "You are the best friends a guy could ever have. I wish you all the things I wish for myself. May you live in happiness forever."

The clink of glasses echoed as the guests toasted Zack and Kelly.

As the guests went back to their conversations, Curt approached the bride and groom. "Curt, how can we thank you?" Kelly asked, giving him a hug.

"Forget about it," Curt said, smiling. "I've got someone who wants to thank *you*." He nodded toward a tall, distinguished-looking man who was approaching them from across the room. When he reached them, Curt put his hand on the man's shoulder. "Zack, Kelly, I'd like you to meet my father, Jack Martin."

"You two are some very courageous kids," Mr. Martin said.

"Thank you, sir," Zack replied. "But we really didn't do that much."

Mr. Martin laughed pleasantly. "Well, what you kids did saved my hotel millions of dollars. I'd like to express my appreciation by giving you two tickets to Paris and first-class accommodations for a honeymoon," he said, handing Kelly a long white envelope.

Kelly just stared at him, overwhelmed by his unexpected generosity. Paris! She had to be dreaming!

It was too much, too generous. "Mr. Martin, we can't accept that," she objected.

"Yes, dear, we can't," Zack cut in sharply. "But

we *will*, because we wouldn't want to be rude, would we?" Zack took the envelope from Mr. Martin. "Thank you, sir."

"You're quite welcome," Mr. Martin assured them, shaking their hands.

"Paris!" Kelly gasped, clapping her hands gleefully as Curt and his father walked away. Just then, her parents approached.

"I can't tell you how proud you two have made us," said Kelly's mom, wrapping Kelly in a hug.

"Ah, Mom."

"You'd better take care of each other," Mr. Kapowski said. His tone was light, but Zack knew he was serious.

"We will, sir," Zack replied solemnly. "We will."

■ ■ ■

The afternoon passed quickly. In no time, the reception was coming to an end. Gazing across the reception area, Zack spotted his father and realized he'd been so occupied with the rest of the guests that he'd hardly spoken to him all day. "Dad!" he called, hurrying over to him.

His father stopped expectantly. "What is it, son?"

"I want to thank you for all this. It means so much."

"Were you surprised that I finally came around?" his father asked.

"Surprised?" Zack replied, thinking about the question. "Maybe I was surprised, but I shouldn't have been. You've always been there for me."

Mr. Morris patted his back. "Hey, it's your life and who am I to tell you how to live it? I have a lot of faith in you, Zachary."

"Zachary," Zack repeated. "You haven't called me that since I was a kid."

"I know," said his father, pulling him into a strong embrace. "I love you, son."

"I love you, too, Dad," Zack replied. As he hugged his father, Zack saw Kelly standing next to his mother. Both of them were smiling at him. At that moment, Zack knew this truly was the happiest day of his life.

chapter 19

"Bye! Bye!" Kelly called as she waved to her family and friends. She and Zack were in the front of the hotel, about to get into the limousine that would take them to the airport. But when Lisa and Curt came through the revolving doors, her hand dropped to her side. They were holding hands, but that wasn't the surprising part. The surprise was Lisa's outfit. She was dressed like a flower child, complete with a tie-dyed headband and Indian beads.

"What's with you?" Zack asked.

"Curt's taking me to visit the reservation and I thought I should dress appropriately," Lisa explained seriously.

"She'll fit right in, don't you think?" Curt asked, a teasing note in his voice.

Lisa put her arm around Kelly. "Well, girl, you've gone and got yourself married. I knew you'd be the first." She looked toward Zack and smiled. "And you, you sure fooled me. I love you guys."

"Best of luck," said Curt, shaking Zack's hand.

"Thanks for everything," Zack said as a valet pulled up with Lisa's BMW. Curt ducked back into the lobby and came out with her large suitcase. He threw it into the backseat as Lisa climbed behind the wheel.

As they pulled away, Slater and Carla came out of the hotel. "What can I say, man," Slater said to Zack. "It's the end of an era. It's been great, man. I'll miss you."

"Hey, it's not over, buddy," Zack assured him. "I think the old lady will let me out once in a while."

"If you're good," Kelly teased.

"Carla's coming back to Los Angeles with me for a couple of days," Slater told them. Kelly was glad. Slater really seemed happy.

"Congratulations," Carla said to Kelly and Zack. "And I'm sorry I put you guys through all this."

"Hey, it turned out okay," Kelly replied, smiling warmly at Carla. "And now we have a new friend."

"I'm lousy at good-byes," Screech said, coming up to them, "so have a real nice life." Without saying more, he began to walk away.

Kelly reached out and grabbed his arm. "Hey, hey," she said soothingly. "We'll be seeing a lot of you. We go to the same university!"

"Right!" Suddenly Screech was smiling from ear to ear.

"But promise you'll call before you come over," Zack added, hugging Screech.

"Promise," said Screech. He gazed affectionately at Kelly and Zack, then over at Slater and Carla, before letting out a deep sigh. "Why me? Why am I the only one without somebody?"

At that moment—as if in answer to Screech's question—a pink limo squealed to a halt in the driveway. Diana Beaujolais jumped out of the backseat. "Sammy! There you are!" she cried in delight.

Screech jumped back. "Stay away from me!" he warned in a frightened voice. "My feet are still swollen from that tango."

Diana advanced toward Screech, her arms outstretched for an embrace. Panicked, Screech bolted down the driveway.

Diana ran after him with unexpected speed, her tremendous heft jiggling beneath her jewel-studded jogging outfit. "Give me another chance, Sammy," she panted. "We were meant for one another."

Kelly, Zack, Carla, and Slater laughed as Screech disappeared down the drive with Diana closing in.

"Some things never change," Zack chuckled. "I have the feeling Screech is going to be getting into jams until the day he dies."

"And I'm going to love you until the day *I* die," said Kelly, slipping her arm around Zack's waist.

Zack kissed her forehead tenderly. "Me, too," he said. "And that's another thing that will never, ever change."




To Have and To Hold

Zack and Kelly are off to Las Vegas—along with the rest of the gang—to tie the knot! They've decided that they want to be together forever, and nothing is going to stand in their way.

But the wedding trip is full of surprises. Lisa's car breaks down on a stretch of deserted highway, leaving her and Kelly temporarily stranded. Zack is pulled over for speeding, and he and the guys get put in jail by a crooked sheriff! And when the gang finally makes it to Las Vegas, they accidentally stumble upon a plot to steal a precious diamond, and the thief wants them out of the way—permanently.

Will the gang survive? Will Zack and Kelly make it to the altar? Find out when you read *To Have and To Hold*, the fabulous new superbook based on "Saved by the Bell," *Wedding in Las Vegas*, the television movie featuring the original "Saved by the Bell" gang.

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